STAND BY ME

THE BODY

Screenplay

by

RAYNOLD GIDEON & BRUCE A. EVANS

Based on a short story

by

STEPHEN KING

FADE IN:

BLACK SCREEN. The TITLE "T H E B O D Y" DISSOLVES UP in white letters.

FADE OUT TITLE.

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - AFTERNOON

A hard autumn RAIN POUNDS an old red Volvo parked on the shoulder. THROUGH the water-streaked WINDOWS we SEE a BLURRED IMAGE of GORDON LACHANCE, early twenties, hunched forward, his head pressed on the steering wheel. We can HEAR him CRYING.

INT. VOLVO - AFTERNOON

Lying on the dash is a crumpled newspaper folded open to a story whose headline reads "Law Student Fatally Stabbed in Restaurant." Outside, a yellow schoolbus splashes by, kicking up a rooster-tail of spray.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - AFTERNOON

Four GIRLS (12 to 13) watch the Volvo get smaller from the back window of the bus.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DAWN

A young deer walks TOWARD US between the silver ribbons of steel. It gets close enough for us to LOOK CLEARLY INTO its dark rusty eyes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
(the adult voice of Gordon Lachance)
In all of our lives there's a fall from innocence. A time after which we are never the same.

With an insouciant flip of its tail, the deer steps OUT OF our VIEW, leaving the tracks to stretch unbroken into infinity.

EXT. CASTLE ROCK (A BLUE-COLLAR MILL TOWN) - MORNING

It's 7:30 and already hot. "THIS TIME" by TROY SHONDELL bleeds in on the SOUNDTRACK. The twelve-year-old GORDON LACHANCE, lank, dark hair, chubby face, walks across the shady common. Temporary platforms have been erected and a banner over them advertises the Castle Rock "Labor Day" picnic.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I was twelve going on thirteen when I first saw a dead human being.

Gordie follows an old MAN and a dog down a tired-looking street.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
It happened in 1960, a long time ago... although sometimes it doesn't seem that long to me. Especially on the nights I wake from dreams where the hail falls into his open eyes.

Gordie enters a vacant lot where a treehouse made of scavenged planks swelters in the lower branches of an ancient elm.

INT. TREEHOUSE - MORNING

CHRIS CHAMBERS (12), good looking, dirty blond, all American, with a fading black eye, sits across a ratty card table from Gordie. Between them, TEDDY DUCHAMP (12), coke-bottle glasses and hair much longer than either of them, draws a card from a stack and discards one in his hand.

CHRIS
How do you know a Frenchman's been in your back yard?

TEDDY
Fuck off. I'm French, okay?

GORDIE
Your garbage cans are empty and your dog is pregnant.

TEDDY
Why can't you use Polacks instead of French in your stupid jokes?

CHRIS
I knock.

Gordie draws and gets nothing helpful. Teddy draws.

CHRIS
(laying down diamonds)
Twenty-nine.

TEDDY
(thinking he's lost)
Twenty-two.

GORDIE
(slams his cards on the table)
Piss up a rope.

TEDDY
(bugles)
Gordie's out. Ole Gordie just bit the bag and stepped out the door. Eeee-eee-eee...

His laugh sounds like a rusty nail being hauled out of a rotten board. Gordie leaves the table and picks up a "Master Detective" to read.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
(as Teddy deals)
Teddy was the craziest guy we hung around with. He was almost blind but his favorite sport was what he called 'truck dodging'. He'd run out in front of the big rigs on 196 and let them miss him by bare inches.

Teddy scratches the back of his head and we GET A GLIMPSE of a flesh-colored hearing aid stuck into an ear that looks like a lump of warm wax.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
His eyesight was just naturally bad, but there was nothing natural about what had happened to his ears.

Chris draws and discards.

TEDDY
I knock.

CHRIS
You four-eyed pile of shit!

TEDDY
(gravely)
The pile of shit has a thousand eyes.

Gordie and Chris look at each other and crack up.

TEDDY
(looks at them quizzically)
What?... What's so fucking funny?... Come on, I got thirty. What have you got?

CHRIS
(laughing)
Sixteen.

TEDDY
You're down to your ride. Come on. Let's go.

Still grinning, Chris starts to shuffle.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Chris was the leader of our gang, and my best friend. He came from a bad family and everybody thought he would turn out bad... including Chris.

We HEAR SOMEONE COMING FAST UP THE LADDER nailed to the side of the elm. Chris stops dealing. A FIST RAPS on the underside of the trapdoor.

CHRIS
Who goes?

VOICE (O.S.)
(excited and out of breath)
Vern.

Gordie pulls the bolt. The trapdoor bangs up and VERN TESSIO, another twelve year old, raises himself into the clubhouse. He's sweating buckets and his hair, which he usually keeps combed in a perfect imitation of his rock and roll idol, Bobby Rydell, is plastered to his bullet head in chunks and strings.

VERN
(panting)
Wow, man! Wait'll you hear this.

GORDIE
Hear what?

VERN
Lemme get my breath. I ran all the way from my house.

TEDDY
(Little Anthony falsetto)
I ran all the way home, just to say I'm soh-ree...

VERN
Fuck your hand, man.

TEDDY
Drop dead in a shed, Fred.

CHRIS
You ran all the way from your place?! Man, you're crazy. It must be ninety out there.

VERN
This is worth it. Holy Jeezum. You won't believe this. Sincerely.

CHRIS
Okay, what?

VERN
Can you guys camp out tonight? I mean if you tell your folks we're gonna tent out in my back field?

CHRIS
(begins to deal again)
Yeah, I guess so. But my dad's on a mean streak.
(taps his black eye)
Drinkin', you know.

VERN
You got to, man. Sincerely. You won't believe this. Can you, Gordie?

GORDIE
Probably.

TEDDY
So what are you pissing and moaning about, Vern-O?

CHRIS
I knock.

TEDDY
What?!! You friggin' liar! You ain't got no pat hand! You didn't deal yourself no pat hand!!

CHRIS
(smirks)
Make your draw, shitheap.

Teddy reaches for the top card on the pile of bikes. Chris reaches for his smoke on the ledge behind him. Gordie bends over to pick up his detective magazine.

VERN
You guys want to go see a dead body?

Everybody stops and looks at Vern.

VERN
I was under the porch digging, you know.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
We all understood what Vern meant right away.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TESSIO HOUSE - EARLIER THAT MORNING

The front porch runs the length of the house — probably forty feet long and seven feet wide. As the Narrator talks, we MOVE TOWARD a small door in the lattice-work skirt that fences in the underside of the porch.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
When Vern was eight he buried a quart jar of pennies under his porch. He drew a treasure map so he could find them again. A week later his mom cleaned out his room and burned his map.

OUR VIEW ARRIVES AT the small doorway and we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO:

UNDER THE PORCH

The ground looks like a prairie-dog city with its little holes and mounds of earth. Halfway toward the other end the twelve-year-old Vern is digging obsessively with a short handle hoe.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Vern had been trying to find those pennies for four years. Four years, man. You didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

The screen door slams open above him and Vern freezes in midstroke. TWO PAIRS OF FOOTSTEPS cross the porch. Carefully Vern moves his eyeballs to look through a crack in the boards. It's his brother BILLY and his juvenile delinquent friend, CHARLIE HOGAN -- both seventeen.

CHARLIE
(in a trembling, crybaby voice)
Jesus Christ, Billy, what are we gonna do?

BILLY
Nuthin'. That's all we're gonna do. Nuthin'.

INTERCUT under porch and exterior of porch.

CHARLIE
We gotta do somethin'. Didn't you see him?

BILLY
(sitting on the steps)
It's nuthin' to us. The kid's dead so it's nuthin' to him, neither. Who gives a fuck if they ever find him? I don't.

CHARLIE
It was that kid they been talking about on the radio.

Vern's head snaps around and he tries to get a look at them through the lattice work.

CHARLIE
It was. Sure as shit. Brocker, Brower, Flowers, whatever his name is. Fuckin' train must have hit him.

BILLY
Yeah...

NARRATOR (V.O.)
We had all followed the Ray Brower story closely because he was a kid our age. Three days before he'd gone out to pick blueberries and nobody'd seen him since.

Billy lights a cigarette and flicks the match into the gravel driveway.

BILLY
You puked.

Vern doesn't want to miss any of this and begins to creep a little closer to the steps.

BILLY
Well, the girls didn't see it. Lucky break.
(he claps Charlie on the back)
They'd blab it from here to Portland. We tore out of there fast, though. You think they knew there was something wrong?

CHARLIE
No. Marie don't like to go down that Back Harlow Road past the cemetery. She's afraid of ghosts...

CHARLIE
(crybaby voice)
Jesus, I wish we'd never boosted no car last night! Just gone to the show like we was gonna!

It's silent while Billy and Charlie think about this.

BILLY
If we told the cops, they'd want to know how we got way the hell out in Harlow. We ain't got no car, neither of us. It's better if we just keep our mouths shut. Then they can't touch us.

CHARLIE
We could make a nonnamus call.

BILLY
They trace those fuckin' calls. I seen it on Highway Patrol and Dragnet.

CHARLIE
Yeah, right. Jesus, I wish Ace'd been with us. We could have told the cops we was in his car.

BILLY
Well, he wasn't.

CHARLIE
Yeah. I guess you're right... We had to walk up and take a piss by the tracks, didn't we? Couldn't walk the other way, could we? And I got puke on my P.F. Flyers... Fuckin' kid was laid right out, you know it? Didja see that sonofawhore, Billy?

BILLY
I seen him.
(tosses cigarette butt away)
Let's go see if Ace is up. I want some juice.

CHARLIE
We gonna tell him?

BILLY
Charlie, we ain't gonna tell nobody. Nobody never. You dig me?

CHARLIE
I dig you. Christ Jesus, I wish we never boosted that fuckin' Dodge.

BILLY
Aw, shut the fuck up and come on.

Two pairs of legs clad in tight, wash-faded jeans, two pairs of feet in black engineer boots with side buckles, come down the steps and keep going.

INT. TREEHOUSE - MORNING

The boy's positions around Vern have changed. They're all sitting facing him now.

TEDDY
I know the Back Harlow Road. It comes to a dead end by the river. We used to fish for cossies out there.

CHRIS
If they'd known you were under there, they would have killed you.

Everybody nods in agreement. Then the idea begins to take hold.

GORDIE
(musing)
Could he have gotten all the way from Chamberlain to Harlow? That's twenty or thirty miles.

CHRIS
I think so. He probably happened on the train tracks and followed them the whole way. After dark a train must have come along and...
(drives his right fist into his left palm)
... el smacko.

TEDDY
(vaguely pleased)
Yeah.

VERN
So anyway, you want to go see it?

Pause. Finally, Chris tosses his cards on the table.

CHRIS
Sure. And I bet you anything we get our pictures in the paper.

VERN
(shocked)
Huh?!

TEDDY
Yeah?

CHRIS
Look. We can find the body and report it, we'll be on the news.

VERN
I dunno. Billy will know where I found out.

GORDIE
No he won't, because it'll be us guys that find that kid, not Billy and Charlie Hogan in a boosted car. Then they won't have to worry about it anymore. They'll probably pin a medal on you.

VERN
Yeah? Yeah, you think so?!

TEDDY
(his grin turning to a frown)
Oh-oh.

VERN
What?!

TEDDY
Our folks. If we find that kid's body over in South Harlow tomorrow, they're gonna know we didn't spend the night campin' out in Vern's back field.

CHRIS
Yeah... They'll know we went looking for that kid.

This almost stops them, then Gordie brightens.

GORDIE
No they won't. We'll just tell 'em we got bored tenting in Vern's field because we've done it so many times before. So we decided to hike up the tracks and have a campout in the woods. I bet we don't even get hided for it because everybody'll be so excited about what we found.

CHRIS
My Dad'll hide me anyway.
(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)
He's on a really mean streak this time.
(shakes his head sullenly)
To hell, it'w worth a hiding.

TEDDY
(shoots his fist in the air)
Okay!!

EXT. STREET - CASTLE ROCK - MORNING

Gordie walks by the Grange Hall -- shuffling his feet to kick up puffs of dust.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
It was set and we drifted off to fix it with our parents.

EXT. BROWN'S GAS STATION - MORNING

A white T-bird with a beautiful GIRL behind the wheel cuts across Gordie's path and stops at the Hi-Test pump.

GIRL
Hi, Gordie.

GORDIE
Hi, Sheila.

Gordie continues on his way, but his eyes stay on the Girl as she gets out of the car to meet the ATTENDANT. It is only when one of the Hi-Test pumps cuts her off from his view that he turns away.

EXT. TWO-STORY GINGERBREAD HOUSE - MORNING

Behind a "Furnished Room To Let" sign in the parlow window, Teddy is speaking to his MOTHER (an older female version of himself, with blonde Beatle-cut hair and thick glasses) while she serves lunch to her two BOARDERS -- a travelling salesman and a cab driver.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Teddy would say he was having supper over at Vern's.

EXT. CHRIS CHAMBERS' HOUSE - MORNING

It is basically a four-room shack with an outhouse. It was painted a long time ago in an unappetizing aqua color.

But now window panes are broken and covered with cardboard. The tar paper is showing and the shingles are peeling. There's an old Dodge up on blocks in the driveway.

INT. BEDROOM - CHAMBERS' HOUSE - MORNING

It's worse than the exterior. While his FATHER, unshaven, 40s, snores bare assed on a filthy bed next to a bleached-blonde HOOKER, Chris is very carefully pulling Winstons out of a pack on the dresser.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
(having started over
EXTERIOR SHOT)
Chris would tell his father he was having supper over at Vern's.

EXT. BACK YARD - TESSIO HOUSE - MORNING

Vern is talking to his MOTHER over the bowl of a three-legged washing machine while his FATHER, lying under it, tries to fix the electric motor.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Vern would tell his parents he was eating at Chris'.

EXT. STREET - CASTLE ROCK - MORNING

Gordie stops for a drink at the water fountain outside of the Volunteers Fire Department.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And I would say that I was having supper over at Vern's.

EXT. CARBINE STREET - CASTLE ROCK - MORNING

Gordie swings himself around a parking meter and trots across the street to enter the drugstore.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
That would work unless there was some emergency we couldn't control or unless any of the parents got together... but none of our folks really knew each other.

INT. DRUGSTORE - MORNING

Gordie picks a John D. MacDonald off the spindle of paperbacks, glances at the blurb on the back;

frowns, replaces it, and slowly twirls the spindle looking for another one. Nothing catches his interest. He leaves the rack and steps into a blast of sunlight at the front door.

EXT. LACHANCE HOUSE - MORNING

A '58 Buick with a blue-haired LADY in it backs out of the driveway of a weathered two-story house. As it goes down the street, it passes Gordie coming up the opposite shoulder.

GORDIE
(waving)
Hi, Mom... Hi...

Gordie's mother is totally lost in thought and, although the windows are open and she probably hears him, it doesn't register. Gordie turns and watches sadly as the car accelerates away from him.

FLASH CUT:

INT. OPEN-AIR JEEP - MILITARY BASE - DAY

DENNY LACHANCE (22), dressed in a private's uniform and faintly resembling Gordie, is driving. Next to him is a red-headed freckle-faced GUY, also in a private's uniform. The world explodes as a ten-ton TRUCK SMASHES into the driver's side of the jeep.

EXT. MILITARY BASE - DAY

In a HOWL of TWISTING METAL and BREAKING GLASS, the ten-ton truck bulldozes the jeep across an intersection and wedges it against a building.

CUT BACK TO:

PRESENT

Gordie watches the brake lights on his mother's car wink twice, then disappear around the corner.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
In April my older brother Dennis had been killed in a jeep accident and my parents just fell to pieces. Four months hadn't been long enough to put them back together again.

EXT. BACK YARD - LACHANCE HOUSE - MORNING

Gordie's FATHER, a tall, stooped man with a tired face and gray hair, is absently passing a fine spray from the hose over his ruined garden. There's a certain unnatural sparkle in his eyes that might be tears.

GORDIE
Hi, Daddy.

His father dabs at his eyes and doesn't turn around.

FATHER
Hello, Gordon.

GORDIE
(offers him a tube of Rollos)
Want one?

FATHER
No thanks.

GORDIE
Be okay if I camp out in Vern Tessio's back field tonight with some of the guys?

FATHER
What guys?

GORDIE
Vern. Teddy Duchamp...
(mumbles)
Maybe Chris.

FATHER
(sighs)
I suppose it's okay.

GORDIE
(turns to go into the house)
Great! Thanks!

FATHER
Gordon?

Gordie turns back.

FATHER
Why can't you have friends like Denny's?

GORDIE
Aw, Dad, they're okay.

FATHER
Of course they are. A thief and two feebs. Fine company for my son.

GORDIE
Chris isn't a thief.

FATHER
What about him stealing the milk money at school last year? He's a thief in my book.

Gordie grits his teeth and changes the subject.

GORDIE
Where's Mom going?

FATHER
She's going to another concert in Boston.

GORDIE
You want anything for lunch?

FATHER
(tired)
No, thanks.

He turns back to his garden. Gordie stares at him for a moment, then enters the house.

INT. GORDIE'S ROOM - LACHANCE HOUSE - MORNING

With a hot dog wrapped in Wonder Bread stuck in his mouth, Gordie is getting ready for his trip. He pulls two blankets out of a drawer and throws them on the bed. With his hands free he tries to take another bite off the hot dog only to have it squirt out onto the floor.

Casually, he picks it up, blows the lint off, and sticks it back in his mouth. Then he selects a Vampire comic out of a stack of comic books and drops that on the blankets. He rolls everything into a bedroll and ties it at both ends with an old belt. He collects all the loose change off the top dresser, then begins to look around for something that's missing.

EXT. LACHANCE HOUSE - MORNING

Mr. Lachance is still watering his garden. Gordie sticks his head out of the second-story window above him.

GORDIE
Daddy, do you know where my canteen is?

FATHER
I think I saw it in Denny's room.

GORDIE
Oh...

He pulls his head back inside. After a long pause he sticks it out again.

GORDIE
You sure?

FATHER
I think so.

INT. LACHANCE HOUSE - MORNING

With the bedroll slung over his shoulder, Gordie is standing in the doorway of Denny's room, looking in. As the Narrator talks, we PAN WITH Gordie's eyes. There are Ivy League college pennants on the walls and senior pictures of Denny and the girls he dated stuck into the mirror. Trues and Sport Illustrateds are stacked neatly on the desk. The bed is freshly made and there's a letterman's jacket hanging off the back of a chair. It's a dead man's room.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I hated going into Denny's room more than anything else in the world. I kept expecting that he would be behind the door, or under the bed, or in the closet. Mostly it was the closet that preyed on my mind.

Gordie's eyes stop. There's the canteen -- all the way across the room, on the windowsill, next to the closet. He gulps a lungful of air and, without looking left or right, scuttles toward it. In one motion he snatches it up and whirls to leave. The HINGES on the closet CREAK. Gordie freezes, not daring to look in that direction. The closet DOOR CREAKS AGAIN.

Gordie's bolt for freedom is cut short by a claw-like hand that drops on his shoulder and spins him back to face the dead DENNIS. He's pallid and bloody. The side of his head is walloped in and a gray-veined cake of blood and brains is drying on his shirt.

DENNY
(croaking)
It should have been you, Gordon.
It should have been you.

INT. LACHANCE HOUSE - MORNING

Gordie flies down the stairway, screaming in terror. We LET HIM GO AND OUR VIEW MOVES UP TO a large picture on the wall of a young man standing and staring at something out of a window.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I'm sure I imagined all that. But that's how I felt. And I used it later.

The SCREEN GOES BLACK. FADE IN the following in white letters.

STUD CITY, by Gordon Lachance. Originally published in Greenspun Quarterly, Issue 45, Fall, 1970. Used by permission.

[NOTE: The following story should be done with the heightened romanticism usually associated with a bruised adolescent "tough guy". We have already seen most of the locations and some of the actors.]

FADE OUT TITLE.

FADE IN:

BLACK AND WHITE - INT. BEDROOM (THE ROOM IN CHRIS' HOUSE) - DAY

CHICO, a seventeen-year-old version of Gordie, stands naked at the window. His breath fogs the glass as he looks out at the RAIN. The bottom right pane is gone, blocked by a piece of cardboard.

GIRL (O.S.)
Chico.

He doesn't turn. He can see a ghost of her in the glass, in his bed, sitting, the blankets pulled up. She's sixteen. Her eye makeup is smeared. Chico shifts his gaze to the yard -- dead grass, a plastic toy, his brother Johnny's Dodge is up on blocks. We HEAR JOHNNY'S VOICE FROM CHICO'S MIND.

JOHNNY (V.O.)
She gonna run fast, Chico.
(MORE)

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
She gonna eat up everything on this road from Gates Falls to Castle Rock. Wait till we get that Hearst shifter in her.

Beyond Johnny's Dodge is the highway.

CHICO
Stud City.

GIRL
What?

CHICO
Nothing, babe.

GIRL
Chico?

CHICO
What?

GIRL
I love you, Chico.

CHICO
That's right.

The RAIN BEATS on the window.

CHICO
This room used to be Johnny's.

GIRL
Who?

CHICO
My brother.

GIRL
Oh. Where is he?

CHICO
In the Army.

CUT TO:

EXT. OXFORD PLAINS SPEEDWAY - SUMMER DAY

A Ford Mustang goes out of control and begins to skid toward the pit area where JOHNNY (played by the same actor who played Denny) is changing the back tires on a Chevy stocker. Fifty feet away, Chico can see what's about to happen.

CHICO
(screams)
Johnny!!! Johnny!!!

But Johnny can't hear him.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. BEDROOM

GIRL
Aren't you cold?

CHICO
No. Well, my feet. A little.

CUT TO:

EXT. OXFORD PLAINS SPEEDWAY

The Ford Mustang is skidding toward Johnny. He still doesn't hear it. We can PICK OUT the knobs of his spine as a series of dimpled shadows against the white of his Hanes T-shirt.

CHICO
Johnny!!!!

Johnny sees the Mustang. He is starting to stand up when it hits him and the whole PIT AREA EXPLODES.

INT. BEDROOM

Chico is still at the window. He is smoking. The Girl gets out of bed. The rain water running down the window makes rippling patterns on her face, her neck, her breasts. Quickly, she crosses to stand behind him.

GIRL
(pressing against him)
Do you love me, Chico?

CHICO
You bet...
(more serious)
You were cherry.

GIRL
What does that...?

CHICO
You were a virgin.

GIRL
I said, didn't I?

CHICO
Was it hard? Did it hurt?

GIRL
No. But I was scared.

They watch the rain. A new Oldsmobile goes by on the highway.

CHICO
Stud City.

GIRL
What?

CHICO
That guy. He's going to Stud City. In his new stud car.

He turns to her. Her eyes flick down to his penis and then up again hastily. Her arms twitch to cover herself, then, embarrassed at her modesty, drops them to her sides.

CHICO
Jane?

JANE (GIRL)
What?

CHICO
It's all right. We're friends.

He leans forward and runs his tongue across her lips, then pulls her back to the bed.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER

An "Easy Rider" poster looks down on Jane as she buttons her blouse. Humming "Tie Me Kangaroo Down", Chico watches her from the bed.

JANE
Zip me up.

He swings out of the bed and zips her jumper. Gently, he kisses her.

CHICO
Go on in the bathroom and do your face if you want. They'll be home pretty quick.

Chico watches her go up the hall and into the bathroom. He turns away, shaking his head.

CHICO
Why did I tell her he was in the Army, for Christ's sake?

He finds his jeans and is putting them on when the HINGES on the closet CREAK. Chico freezes. The CLOSET DOOR CREAKS AGAIN. Slowly, Chico turns to look -- Johnny, his body charred and twisted and blackened, his teeth like yellow dentures, is standing in front of the clothes.

JOHNNY
(whispers)
Get out of my room, Chico. And if you lay a hand on my Dodge, I'll fuckin' kill you.

CHICO
Got it, bro.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

On their way to the front door, Jane pauses in front of a tinted studio photograph on top of the TV. It shows Chico's father (played by the same actor playing Gordie's dad) and a younger woman, a high-school-age Johnny, and a grammar-school-age Chico.

JANE
That your mother and father?

CHICO
It's my father. She's my step-mother, Virginia. Come on.

JANE
Don't you like her?

CHICO
She killed Johnny.

JANE
I thought you said he was in the Army.

CHICO
He is.

EXT. CHICO'S HOUSE - DAY

It's Chris' house -- complete with exposed tar paper and peeling shingles. An old Buick backs out of the driveway. When it hits the road, the RADIO BLARES ON with its call letters -- WALM Lewiston -- it's SHUT OFF immediately.

INT. BUICK - DAY

Jane is snuggled up against Chico. The front seat upholstery has been covered with a brown Army blanket. A large button pinned to the sun visor on the passenger side says: I WANT IT EVERY DAY. They drive past the Grange Hall and the Volunteer Fire Department.

An attractive WOMAN (25) is standing next to a white T-bird parked at Brown's gas station. Chico raises a hand to her as he turns off the main road.

JANE
Who's that?

CHICO
Sally Morrison.

JANE
Pretty lady..

CHICO
(feeling for his cigarettes)
She's been married twice and divorced twice. Now she's the town pump, if you believe half the talk that goes on in this shitass little town.

JANE
Have you ever...?

CHICO
(slides his hand up her leg and smiles)
My brother, maybe, but not me. I like Sally, though. She's got her alimony and her big white Bird, she doesn't care what people say about her.

Jane looks back at Sally.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The Buick is slogging along next to the Androscoggin River, which looks slaty and sullen in the rain.

INT. BUICK - DAY

Jane has grown quiet and thoughtful. The only sound is the steady SNAP of the WINDSHIELD WIPERS. Chico smokes.

CHICO
(without looking at Jane)
Virginia wouldn't leave Johnny alone. You know what I mean...? He could have got a job at the mill at night. But my old man worked days and that would have put Johnny alone with her. So he got a job at the Speedway. He told my old man it was because he could get parts for the Dodge on the cheap.
(a single tear courses down Chico's cheek)
Car went out of control and killed him.

JANE
Oh, Chico, I'm sorry.

She kisses away the tear and lays her head on his shoulder.

JANE
I'm so sorry.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

The homes the Buick passes all look packaged.

INT. BUICK - DAY

Chico and Jane see a little BOY in a yellow plastic raincoat walking up the sidewalk, carefully stepping in all the puddles.

CHICO
(softly)
Go, man.

JANE
What?

CHICO
Nothing, babe. Go back to sleep.

She laughs a little doubtfully.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

The Buick pulls into the driveway of one of the packaged houses, but Chico doesn't turn off the ignition.

INT. BUICK - DAY

JANE
Come in and I'll give you cookies.

CHICO
I have to get back.

JANE
I know.

She looks down at his hands, then puts her arms around him and kisses him.

JANE
Thank you for the most wonderful time of my life.

CHICO
(smiles)
I'll see you Monday, Janey-Jane. Still friends, right?

JANE
You know we are.

She kisses him again, but when he cups a breast through her jumper, she pulls away.

JANE
(giggling)
Don't. My father might see.

He lets her go. She gets out quickly and he watches her run through the rain to the back door. A second later she's gone.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

The Buick backs slowly out of the driveway and pulls off into the RAIN.

CHICO (V.O.)
Stud City. In his new stud car. Funky.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Pretty fucking melodramatic, right?

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.)
At the time I wrote 'Stud City', I had been to bed with only two girls and had ejaculated prematurely all over one of them. Not much like Chico, I guess. And yet it was the first story I ever wrote that felt like my story.

EXT. STREET - CASTLE ROCK - 1960 - NOON

The twelve-year-old Gordon, his canteen slapping against his hip and the bedroll slung across his back, is on his way to Vern's.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The first time I had ever really used the place I knew and the things I felt in a piece of fiction -- like that childhood idea of Denny being in the closet. It was the first time I saw the true face of Gordon Lachance in print -- younger than the one living and writing now, but not so young as the one who went with his friends that day to see the body of a dead kid named Ray Brower.

A dark car swerves to the curb and drops off Chris. He has an old Boy Scout pack in one hand and two blankets rolled up and tied with clothesrope in the other.

CHRIS
Thanks, mister.
(he trots over to Gordie)
Hey, Gordie, you wanna see something?

GORDIE
Sure, I guess. What?

CHRIS
Come on down here first.

He starts down an alley between the Blue Point Diner and the Castle Rock Drugstore.

GORDIE
What is it?

CHRIS
Come on.

After a brief moment, Gordie follows him.

EXT. ALLEY - NOON

Chris stops in front of the garbage cans behind the Blue Point Diner.

GORDIE
(catching up)
Phew! Chris! Come on, gimme a break!

CHRIS
(digging in his pack)
Gimme your arm.

GORDIE
No, sincerely, I'm gonna throw u...

Words break off in Gordie's mouth and his eyes grow wide when he sees Chris pull a huge pistol with dark wood grips out of his pack.

CHRIS
You wanna be the Lone Ranger or the Cisco Kid?

GORDIE
Walking, talking Jesus!! Where'd you get that?!!

CHRIS
Hawked it out of my dad's bureau.

Gordie takes it and turns it over in his hand.

CHRIS
It's a forty five.

GORDIE
Yeah, I can see that.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
That was a crock. It could have been a machine gun for all I knew.

GORDIE
You got shells for it?

CHRIS
Nine of them -- all that was left in the box. My dad'll think he used 'em himself, shooting at cans while he was drunk.

GORDIE
Is it loaded?

CHRIS
No! Chrissake, what do you think I am?

GORDIE
(hefts the gun in his hand)
Wow.

He looks around, then takes aim at one of the trash cans and pulls the trigger:

KA-BLAM!

A huge hole appears in the corrugated metal.

GORDIE
(screams)
Jesus!!

Chris laughs wildly in amusement or hysterical terror -- we can't tell which.

CHRIS
You did it, you did it! Gordie did it.
(shouts)
Gordon Lachance is shooting up Castle Rock!

Gordie grabs Chris by the shirt and begins to pull him back up the alley.

GORDIE
Shut up! Let's get out of here!

The back door to the Blue Point jerks open and a buxom old WAITRESS in a white uniform charges out.

WAITRESS
(yells at the boys' backs)
Who did that? Who's letting off cherry bombs back here?

Chris and Gordie run like hell up the alley -- past the drugstore, past the Emporium Galorium. Gordie tosses the .45 to Chris. Chris is killing himself laughing, but catches it and somehow manages to stuff it back in his knapsack. They vault over a fence and find themselves back on the street. They slow down so they won't look suspicious.

CHRIS
Man, you shoulda seen your face. Oh man, that was priceless. That was really fine.

GORDIE
You knew it was loaded, didn't you? You wet. I'm gonna be in trouble. That Tupper babe saw me.

CHRIS
Shit, she thought it was firecrackers. Besides, old Thunderjugs can't see past the end of her nose, you know that.

GORDIE
Well, I don't care. That was a mean trick, Chris. Really.

CHRIS
Come on, Gordie. I didn't know it was loaded, honest to God.

GORDIE
You really didn't load it?

CHRIS
No sir.

GORDIE
You swear it on your mother's name even if she goes to hell for you telling a lie?

CHRIS
I swear.

He crosses himself and spits, then starts to laugh again.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - NOON

The steel ribbons are heliographing in the sun. The heat is savage and we can HEAR the BOYS struggling up the cindery embankment.

TEDDY (O.S.)
What do we need a pistol for anyway?

CHRIS (O.S.)
It's spooky sleeping out at night in the woods. Besides, we might see a bear... or a garbage can.

The BOYS LAUGH. Chris COMES INTO VIEW.

GORDIE (O.S.)
Did you set your tent up in the field?

VERN (O.S.)
Yeah. And I put two flashlights in it so it'll look like we're there after dark.

Teddy, Gordie, and Vern COME INTO VIEW. Teddy and Vern also have bedrolls and, like Gordie, Vern has a canteen.

TEDDY
(clapping Vern on the back)
Hot shit!

GORDIE
That's a lot of thinking, Vern-O!

Their congratulations fade as they join Chris, who is staring silently down the tracks. Somehow they catch his mood. With their shirts tied around their waists and sweating like pigs, they all stand there for a moment looking into their future. Finally, Teddy, after a glance at Castle Rock behind them:

TEDDY
How far do you think it's gonna be?

CHRIS
We'll walk across the trestle into Harlow. Harlow's big. We're gonna be walking at least twenty miles. That sound right to you, Gordie?

GORDIE
Yeah. It might even be thirty.

VERN
Gee, maybe we should just hitchhike.

TEDDY
Fuck no. That sucks.

VERN
All we have to do is go up Route 7 to the Shiloh church, then down the Back Harlow Road. We'll be there by sundown.

TEDDY
That's pussy.

GORDIE
Did your mother ever have any kids that lived?

VERN
Hey, it's a long ways...

CHRIS
Even if it's thirty, we ought to be there by tomorrow afternoon, if no one goes pussy.

TEDDY
No pussies here.

They all look at each other.

VERN
Miaoww...

CHRIS
(through their laughter)
Come on, you guys.

And with Chris slightly in the lead, they start off.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A black '52 Ford with gangster whitewalls, spinner hubcaps and high-rise chrome bumpers is barreling along with its right wheels off in the dirt. ACE MERRILL, a good-looking mean twenty one, leans out the right rear window with a baseball bat.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
About this time Charlie and Billy were playing mailbox baseball with Ace Merrill and Chris' brother Eyeball. Fuzzy Bracowicz was driving.

Ace takes a vicious swing at a farmer's mailbox and lofts it into a potato field.

ACE

HOME RUN!!

INT. '52 FORD - DAY

Ace, Billy, EYEBALL (he has a jittery left eye) and Charlie are all squeezed into the back seat. They're all drinking beer.

ACE
(handing him the bat)
You're up, Billy Boy.

BILLY
Naw, you guys win.

ACE
It's only six to three. You can catch up.

CHARLIE
Maybe we could do something else, Ace.

ACE
What's the matter with you two? You've been dragging ass all day. Come on, I want to finish this game.

EXT. '52 FORD - DAY

Billy leans out and cocks his bat.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
If we'd had any brains, we'd have known that sooner or later Charlie and Billy would crack. The only way those two could have kept a secret was if they forgot it.

Billy swings. TWANG! The mailbox is left damaged and dangling off its post.

ACE (O.S.)
Foooul baaall...

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

The boys are walking two on either side of the rails:

Vern and Chris on one side, Teddy and Gordie on the other. Vern is singing "Roll Me Over in the Clover". Chris takes a swig from Vern's canteen and hands it back. Gordie drinks deeply from his own.

GORDIE
We're gonna have to fill up at the dump faucet. My dad says it's a safe well. It's a hundred and ninety feet deep.

CHRIS
Okay. That'll be a good place to take five, anyway.

VERN
Not if Chopper's there.

GORDIE
If he is, we'll send you in.

VERN
Very funny... Roll me over lay me down and do it again... This is number thirty-four...

Suddenly, a thought hits Teddy and he stops.

TEDDY
What about food?

The rest of them stop and look at him.

TEDDY
I bet nobody thought to bring something to eat. I know I didn't.

CHRIS
Shit! I didn't either. Gordie?

Gordie shakes his head disgustedly.

CHRIS
Vern?

VERN
Zip. Sorry.

TEDDY
Shit!

The boys look at each other, not knowing exactly what to do. Finally:

GORDIE
Well, let's see how much money we got.

He unties his shirt and spreads it out on the cinders. The boys dig deep in their pockets. Chris is the first to drop his money on the shirt.

GORDIE
A dollar two from Chris... I got sixty-eight cents.

Teddy drops his.

GORDIE
Sixty cents from Teddy.

Vern drops his.

GORDIE
Seven cents, Vern?

VERN
Hey, I haven't found my pennies yet.

After a look at Vern, Gordie counts it all together.

GORDIE
Two thirty seven. Not bad. There's a store at the end of that little road that goes to the dump. Somebody'll have to walk down there and get some hamburger and some tonics while the others rest.

VERN
(scared)
Who?

GORDIE
We'll match for it when we get to the dump.

CHRIS
TRAIN!!!

VERN
Geronimo!!

He leaps halfway down the embankment in one crazy, clownish stride. We can HEAR the TRAIN COMING. Gordie puts his hand on one of the rails to feel it. It's thrumming crazily. Chris jumps after Vern.

Gordie gathers up the money. He is stuffing it in his pockets when he sees that Teddy is standing in the center of the tracks watching the train, which we can now SEE is rushing toward them.

Teddy's glasses glitter in the sun. His long hair flops untidily over his brow in sweat-soaked stringers and he is grinning. The train is getting closer.

GORDIE
Come on, Teddy.

TEDDY
No, huh-uh, I'm gonna dodge it.

He looks at Gordie, his magnified eyes frantic with excitement.

TEDDY
A train dodge, dig it? What's trucks after a fuckin' train dodge?

He turns back to face the train.

GORDIE
You're crazy, man! You want to get killed?!

TEDDY
Just like the beach at Normandy!!

Gordie is stunned for a moment, unable to believe Teddy's stupidity. The train is speeding down on them.

GORDIE
Shit!

He springs at Teddy, grabs him and drags him fighting and protesting to the embankment and pushes him over. Teddy manages to pull Gordie down with him and, hitting and clawing at each other, they roll all the way to the bottom. Teddy comes up swinging. Half laughing, half scared, Gordie slaps away his punches with his open hands.

TEDDY
You little son of a bitch! You fucker! Don't throw your weight around on me! I'll kill you, you dipshit!

GORDIE
Teddy, you can dodge anything you want after we see what we're going to see, but...
(MORE)

GORDIE (CONT'D)
(whack on the shoulder)
... until then no one's supposed to see us.
(whack on the side of the face; Gordie charges Teddy)
You stupid wet end!

Vern grabs Gordie and Chris grabs Teddy and they pull them apart.

TEDDY
I want to kill him! At least give him a fat lip!

The TRAIN ROARS BY ABOVE them. The THUNDER of diesel exhaust and the great heavy CLACKING OF BOXCAR WHEELS DROWNS OUT the BOYS' VOICES. The train is a short one, but by the time it passes Gordie and Teddy have calmed down.

CHRIS
Peace, you guys.

GORDIE
Yeah, okay.
(holds out his hand, palm up)
Peace, Teddy?

Teddy's glasses are askew and his hearing aid cord dangles against his chest.

TEDDY
I coulda dodged it.

CHRIS
You can dodge it on the way back. Skin it, man.

Teddy slaps Gordie's hand real hard and Gordie slaps Teddy's real hard.

TEDDY
Fuckin' pussy Lachance.

GORDIE
Méeeioww...

VERN
Come on, you guys. Let's go, okay?

CHRIS
Go anywhere you want, but don't go here.

CLOSE ON A SIGN

CASTLE ROCK DUMP
HOURS 4-8 P.M.
CLOSED MONDAYS
TRESPASSING STRICTLY
FORBIDDEN

Beyond the sign, thousands of seagulls circle and swarm over the garbage.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Trespassing strictly forbidden was enforced by Milo Pressman, the dumpkeeper, and his dog Chopper.

A sneakered foot slaps down on the top of the sign, then springs off of it to help the owner vault over the fence.

TEDDY
Paratroops over the side!!!

He drops to the ground on the other side.

EXT. CASTLE ROCK DUMP - DAY

The pump -- the kind from which you have to call the water with elbow grease -- stands in a bulldozed area not far from a tar-paper shack and a stunted ash. Vern jumps off the fence and lands next to Teddy and together they run toward the pump.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Chopper was the most feared and least-seen dog in Castle Rock. People said he was a hellhound. The most common story was that Milo had trained Chopper not just to sic but to sic specific parts of the human anatomy.

Gordie and Chris drop into the dump.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Thus, a kid who had illegally scaled the dump fence might hear the dread cry: Chopper! Sic! Balls! And that kid would be a soprano for the rest of his life ... But right now, neither the kid-eating Chopper nor Milo was anywhere in sight.

Walking across the flattened ground, Gordie and Chris watch Teddy working the pump handle frantically. Suddenly, he is rewarded with a flood of clear water and he and Vern stick their heads under the trough, Teddy still pumping away a mile a minute.

GORDIE
Teddy's crazy.

CHRIS
Oh yeah. He won't live to be twice the age he is now, I bet. His dad burnin' his ears like that. That's what did it. He's crazy to dodge trucks the way he does. He can't see worth a shit, glasses or no glasses.

GORDIE
You remember that time in the tree?

FLASH CUT:

CRACK! Teddy topples from the top of a tall pine, crashing and smashing through the branches toward the ground one hundred and twenty feet below. As he falls by Chris, Chris' hand stabs out and catches a fistful of his hair. Teddy screams but he is saved.

CUT BACK TO:

PRESENT

CHRIS
I dream about that every now and then. Except in the dream I always miss him. I just get a couple of hairs and Teddy screams and down he goes. Weird, huh?

GORDIE
Weird.

He and Chris look at each other.

GORDIE
Yeah, but you didn't miss him. Chris Chambers never misses, am I right?

CHRIS
Not even when the ladies leave the seat down.

He winks at Gordie, forms an O with his thumb and forefinger, and spits a neat white bullet through it. They

CHRIS
Race you.

GORDIE
In this heat? You're off your gourd.

CHRIS
Come on. On my go.

GORDIE
Okay.

CHRIS
GO!

They race -- their sneakers digging up the hard, sunbaked dirt, their torsos leaning out ahead of their flying blue-jeaned legs. It's a dead heat with both Vern on Chris' side and Teddy on Gordie's holding up their middle fingers at the same moment.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DUMP - DAY

The boys are sprawled in the shade of the ash tree. Their faces are clean and their hair and shirts are wet and, for the first time since we've met them, they're quiet -- just watching the life of the dump around them.

VERN
(breaking their silence)
This is really a good time.

CHRIS
The most.

GORDIE
A blast.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Vern didn't just mean being off-limits inside the dump, or fudging our folks, or going on a hike up the railroad tracks into Harlow...

As the Narrator talks, our VIEW CHANGES TO GIVE US A SENSE OF TIME PASSING and we HEAR FRAGMENTS of the BOYS' CONVERSATION UNDER HIS VOICE.

BOYS
Yankees are the best... I like the Red Sox... Mantle and Maris...
(MORE)

BOYS (CONT'D)
Never dodge a '58 Corvette, but I would a '55 T-Bird... Jamie Gallant's tougher... Eliot Ness ... I think Peter Gunn's cool...

NARRATOR (V.O.)
... he meant those things, but it seems to me now that there was more, and that we all knew it. Everything was there and around us. We knew exactly who we were and exactly where we were going. It was grand.

The light has changed and the shadows have lengthened on the boys underneath the tree.

TEDDY
What time is it, Gordie?

GORDIE
Quarter after two.

VERN
Hey, man, somebody's got to go for provisions. Dump opens at four. I don't want to still be here when Milo and Chopper make the scene.

GORDIE
Okay. Odd man goes?

CHRIS
That's you, Gordie. Odd as a cod.

GORDIE
So's your mother.
(he gives them each a coin)
Flip.

They flip and uncover.

GORDIE
Two heads and two tails. Flip again.

Four coins spin up into the sun. Four hands snatch them from the air. Four flat smacks on four grimy wrists. Four coins are uncovered.

VERN
Four tails! Oh Jesus, that's a goocher.

CHRIS
Fuck that shit. It doesn't mean anything. Go again.

VERN
No, man. A goocher, that's really bad. You remember when Clint Bracken and those guys got wiped out on Sirois Hill in Durham? Billy tole me they was flippin' for beers and they came up a goocher just before they got into the car. And bang! They all get fuckin' totalled. I don't like that. Sincerely.

TEDDY
Nobody believes that crap about moons and goochers. It's baby stuff, Vern. Come on.

Teddy flips. Chris and Gordie follow.

TEDDY
(the coin covered on his wrist)
You gonna flip or not?

Reluctantly, Vern flips. The boys uncover. Vern, Chris and Teddy still have tails. Gordie is showing Thomas Jefferson on a nickel.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Three tails, one head. Suddenly I was scared. They still had a goocher, the three of them, as if dumb fate had pointed at them a second time.

Teddy starts to laugh his crazy cackling laugh and points at Gordie.

GORDIE
I heard that only fairies laugh like that.

TEDDY
Eeee-eeee-eee, Gordie. Go get the provisions, you fuckin' morphadite.

GORDIE
Don't call me any of your mother's pet names.

TEDDY
Eeee-eee-eeee, what a fuckin' wet you are, Lachance.

GORDIE
(getting up)
You guys better not go without me.

CHRIS
We'll wait for you over by the tracks.

VERN
Goin' without you'd be like goin' with Slitz instead of Budweiser's, Gordie.

GORDIE
Ah, shut up.

TEDDY/VERN/CHRIS
(chant)
I don't shut up, I grow up. And when I look at you I throw up.

GORDIE
(backing away)
Then your mother goes around the corner and licks it up.

He gives them the finger, then turns and runs off toward the entrance to the dump.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve. Jesus, does anyone?

INT. FLORIDA MARKET - DAY

It's a small country store. The owner, GEORGE DUSSET, is slowly piling hamburger meat onto his scale and trying to keep an eye on Gordie, who is shopping for the rest of the boys' provisions.

DUSSET
I know you. You're Denny Lachance's brother. Ain't you?

He takes a swig from a bottle of S'OK cream soda.

GORDIE
Yes, sir. But Denny, he...

DUSSET
Yeah, I know. That's a sad thing, kid. The Bible says: 'In the midst of life, we are in death'. Did you know that? Yuh. I lost a brother in Korea.

Gordie lays his purchases on the counter.

DUSSET
You look just like Denny, people ever tell you that? Yuh. Spitting image.

GORDIE
(glumly)
Yes, sir, sometimes.

Dusset puts another spatula of meat on the scale, then has a thought and looks out the screen door like he's having a vision.

DUSSET
I remember the year he was All-Conference. Halfback, he played. Yuh. Could he run? Father God and Sonny Jesus! You're probably too young to remember.

GORDIE
I remember. Uh, Mr. Dusset?

DUSSET
(his eyes still misty with memory)
What, kid?

GORDIE
Your thumb is on that scales.

DUSSET
What?!

He looks down, astounded, to where the ball of his thumb is pressed firmly on the white enamel.

DUSSET
Why so it is! Yuh.

He takes his thumb off the scales, the needle springs back six ounces.

DUSSET
I guess I just got to thinking about your brother, God love him.

He crosses himself, then pats a little more meat on top of the order and does the whole package up in white butcher's paper.

DUSSET
Okay. Let's see what we got here. Three pounds of hamburg...
(writing on the grocery bag)
That's a dollar forty four. Hamburg rolls, that's twenty seven. Four sodas, forty cents. One churchkey, two pence. Comes to... two twenty nine.

GORDIE
Thirteen.

DUSSET
(looks up slowly, frowning)
Huh?

GORDIE
Two thirteen. You added it wrong.

DUSSET
Kid, are you...?

GORDIE
You added it wrong. First you put your thumb on the scales and then you overcharged on the groceries, Mr. Dusset. I was gonna throw some Hostess Twinkies on top of that order, but now I guess I won't.

Gordie spangs two dollars and thirteen cents down on the Schlitz placemat in front of him. Dusset looks at the money, then at Gordie.

DUSSET
What are you, kid? Some kind of smartass?

GORDIE
No, sir. But you ain't gonna jap me and get away with it. What would your mother say if she knew you was japping little kids?

Dusset angrily thrusts the bag of provisions at Gordie, making the Coke BOTTLES CLINK together.

DUSSET
Okay, kid. Here you go. Now what you do is you get the Christ out of my store. I see you in here again and I going to throw you out, me. Yuh. Smartass little sonofawhore.

GORDIE
(walking away)
I won't come here again.
(he pushes open the screen door)
Neither will none of my friends. I guess I got fifty or so.

DUSSET
Your brother wasn't no smartass!

GORDIE
Fuck you.

EXT. FLORIDA MARKET - DAY

Gordie pops out of the market and runs like hell down the road. The screen door bangs open like a gunshot behind him and Dusset's bull roar comes after him.

DUSSET
If you ever come in here again, I'll fat your lip for you, you little punk.

Gordie looks back, but Dusset's not following. The relief spreads a grin across his face, and with a whoop of triumph he adds a little dance step to his run.

EXT. DUMP ENTRANCE - DAY

Gordie arrives at the gate. He puts the bag inside his shirt, climbs up one side of the gate, and monkeys down the other.

EXT. DUMP - DAY

Gordie is halfway across the dump area when a sun flash off a car grille causes him to pause in midstride. He looks to his right. Milo Pressman's '56 portholed Buick is peeking out at him from behind the tar-paper shack. Gordie makes a small moaning noise in his throat.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Milo had decided to come to work early.

Gordie's eyes measure the distance between where he is and where he wants to go. The fence is a long ways away.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I knew Chopper was around some place.

Gordie looks around. He's all alone. He starts putting one foot in front of the other, slowly at first, then faster and faster.

MILO, fat, forty, wearing a N.Y. Giants baseball cap, straightens up from getting something out of the trunk of his car and spots Gordie.

MILO
Hey! Hey, you kid! Get away f'n that fence! Get outta here!

Gordie breaks into a run, his sneakers kicking up hard little clods of dirt. Vern, Teddy, and Chris come out of the underbrush on the other side of the fence and stare anxiously through the chain link.

MILO
You come back here! Come back here or I'll sic my dawg on you, Goddamnit!

Gordie runs even faster, his arms pumping, the BOTTLES in the brown paper bag under his shirt CLANGING together. Teddy's high-pitched laugh eee-eee-eeee floats over it all.

VERN
Go, Gordie! Go!

MILO
(yells)
Sic 'im, Chopper! Go get 'im, boy!

NARRATOR (V.O.)
That's what he said. But what I heard was: 'Chopper, sic balls!'

With a bloodcurdling scream, Gordie doubles his speed. We can HEAR CHOPPER GROWLING and TEARING UP THE EARTH behind him.

Still screaming, Gordie leaps and lands halfway up the fence. He scrambles to the top and, without looking, simply jumps.

On the other side he almost lands on Teddy, who is doubled over and laughing like crazy. At the same instance, Chopper hits the chain-link fence behind him and lets out a HOWL of mingled pain and disappointment.

Gordie turns around, holding one skinned knee, to get a look at the famous Chopper. What he sees is not some huge hellhound but a perfectly common, medium-sized black-and-white mongrel dog who is yapping and jumping fruitlessly at the fence.

GORDIE
That's Chopper?!!

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Chopper was my first lesson in the vast difference between myth and reality.

TEDDY
(starts to strut up and down in front of the fence)
Kiss my ass, Choppie! Kiss my ass! Bite shit!

Teddy bumps his fanny against the chain-link fence and Chopper does his level best to take Teddy up on his invitation. He does nothing but rack out his nose, which is bleeding already. Chris and Vern are lying weakly on the embankment, laughing so hard that they can do little more than wheeze.

MILO
(waddling toward them)
Here, here! You boys stop a-teasing that dawg! You hear me? Stop it right now!

TEDDY
(turning around)
Come on, Choppie! Sic me!
(he cups his hands over his crotch and thrusts his hips forward)
Come on! Sic balls!

Chopper goes nuts. He runs around in a big circle, yelping and barking and foaming, while he gets up speed; then launches himself straight at the security fence. He is going about thirty miles an hour when he hits it. The whole FENCE MAKES A LOW MUSICAL SOUND like a zither note -- yiii

Chopper gives a strangled yelp, both eyes come up blank, and he does a totally amazing reverse snap-roll, landing on his back with a solid thump. He lays there for a moment, then struggles to his feet, his tongue hanging crookedly from the left side of his mouth. Milo goes berserk.

MILO
I know you!! You're Teddy Duchamp!! I know all of you!! Sonny, I'll beat your ass, teasing my dawg like that!!

TEDDY
(raves back)
Like to see you try! Let's see you climb over this fence and get me, fat ass!

MILO
WHAT?! WHAT DID YOU CALL ME?!

TEDDY
FAT ASS! LARD BUCKET! TUBBA GUTS! COME ON! COME ON!

MILO
You little tin-weasel peckerwood loony's son! I'll see your mother gets an invitation to go down and talk to the judge in court about what you done to my dawg!

Teddy stops jumping up and down. His face goes pale. Vern and Chris stop laughing.

TEDDY
(hoarsely)
What did you call me?

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Milo had called Teddy a lot of things, but he was able to go back and get the one that had struck home with no trouble at all.

MILO
(smiles)
Your dad was a loony. Loony up in Togus, that's what. He held your ears to the stove and burned them off.

(MORE)

MILO (CONT'D)
He's crazier than a shithouse rat. Crazier'n a buck with tickwood fever. Loony. No wonder you're actin' the way you are, with a loony for a f...

TEDDY
YOUR MOTHER BLOWS DEAD RATS!!

Vern and Chris go back into hysterics.

TEDDY
AND IF YOU CALL MY DAD A LOONY AGAIN, I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU, YOU COCKSUCKER!!

Chopper is walking in a large dazed figure eight behind Milo. Teddy and Milo are nose to nose with the wire fence between them.

MILO
(smugly)
Loony. Loony's kid, loony's kid, your father's got toys in the attic, kid, tough break.

TEDDY
Don't you say nothing else about my dad! My dad stormed the beach at Normandy, you fucking wet end!

MILO
Yeah, well, where is he now, you ugly little four-eyed turd? He's up to Togus because HE WENT FUCKING SECTION EIGHT!

TEDDY
Okay, that's it. That's it, that's the end. I'm gonna kill you.

Teddy throws himself at the fence and starts up.

MILO
You come on and try it, you slimy little bastard.

GORDIE
(struggling out of his laughter)
No!

He gets to his feet and grabs Teddy by the loose seat of his jeans and pulls him off the fence. They both stagger back and fall over, Teddy on top.

TEDDY
Lemme up! Lemme up, Gordie! Nobody ranks out my old man. LEMME UP, GODDAMNIT! LEMME UP!

GORDIE
That's just what he wants! He want to get you over there and beat the piss out of you and then take you to the cops.

TEDDY
Huh?

MILO
Never mind your smart mouth, kid. Let'im fight his own battles.

GORDIE
Sure. You only outweight him by five hundred pounds.

MILO
(ominously)
I know you, too. Your name's Lachance.

He points to Vern and Chris, who are still breathing fast from laughing so hard.

MILO
And those guys are Chris Chambers and one of those stupid Tessio kids. All your fathers are going to get calls from me, except for the loony up to Togus. You'll go to the 'formatory, every one of you. Juvenile delinquents!

He stands there, his fists clenched, glaring at the boys trying to intimidate them. Calmly, Chris makes an O out of his thumb and index finger and spits neatly through it. Vern hums and looks at the sky.

TEDDY
Come on, Gordie. Let's get away from this asshole before I puke.

The boys start back into the woods toward the tracks.

MILO
Come back here! Come back here! You foulmouthed little whore master! Wait'll I get you to the Constable!

GORDIE
We heard what you said about his father. We're all witnesses.

MILO
'Formatory! 'Formatory for you wise guys!

CHRIS
(calling back through the trees)
I can't wait to tell the cops how you called a war vet a fuckin' loony. What did you do in the war, Mr. Pressman?

MILO
NONE OF YOUR DAMN BUSINESS!! YOU HURT MY DAWG!!

VERN
(climbing the railroad embankment)
Put it on your t.s. slip and send it to the chaplain.

MILO
(in their direction)
Come back here... I said come back here, Goddamnit... Come back here. You kids come back here...

He stands there, a big man in a baseball cap with his big-dog sitting drunkenly beside him. He looks like the biggest third-grader in the world, locked inside the playground by mistake, yelling for someone to come and let him out.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

A gloomy silence has settled on the boys. MILO can be HEARD FAINTLY over the CRUNCH OF their FOOTSTEPS.

VERN
We showed him. Thought we were a bunch of pussies.

GORDIE & CHRIS

Yeah...

They walk on. The distance FADES MILO'S VOICE TO NOTHING. Without warning, Teddy bursts into tears. The sobs are fierce. They double him over like punches and he collapses into a heap, his hands going from his stomach to the mutilated gobs of flesh that are the remains of his ears. Chris, Vern, and Gordie walk away a little and watch him with their hands in their pockets.

VERN

Hey, man...

Chris and Gordie look at Vern hopefully, but he can't follow it up and he just shrugs. Teddy leans forward on the crossties and puts a hand over his eyes. He's crying hard, violent bursts. At last, Chris goes over and puts an arm around his shoulder.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Chris was the toughest guy in our gang, but he was also the guy who made the best peace.

CHRIS
Listen, Teddy, what do you care what a fat old pile of shit like him said about your father? Huh? I mean, sincerely! That don't change nothing, does it? What a fat old pile of shit like him says? Huh? Huh? Does it?

Teddy shakes his head violently.

CHRIS
He still stormed the beach at Normandy, right?

He picks up one of Teddy's sweaty, grimy hands and pats it. Teddy nods fiercely, crying. Snot is running out of his nose.

CHRIS
Do you think that pile of shit was at Normandy?

TEDDY
(shakes his head vehemently)
Nuh-nuh-no!

CHRIS
Do you think that guy knows you?

TEDDY
Nuh-no! No, b-b-but...

CHRIS
Or your father? He one of your father's buddies?

TEDDY
(horrified)
NO!

CHRIS
(calmly)
Talk is cheap. And whatever's between you and your old man, talk can't change that.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Teddy had always thought of his dad as a war hero. Milo had brought it home that everybody else had merely dismissed him as a loony. This would have to be examined later. In depth. On long, sleepless nights.

CHRIS
(soothing)
He was ranking you, man. He was trying to rank you over that friggin' fence, you know it? He don't know nothin' about your old man. He's just dogshit, man. Right, Teddy? Huh? Right?

Teddy's crying is now down to sniffles. He wipes his eyes and sits up.

TEDDY
I'm okay.
(stronger)
Yeah, I'm okay.

He stands up and puts his glasses back on -- dressing his naked face -- and wipes his nose.

TEDDY
Fuckin' crybaby, right?

VERN
No, man. If anyone was rankin' out my dad...

TEDDY
Then you got to kill 'em! Kill their asses. Right, Chris?

CHRIS
(amiably)
Right.

TEDDY
Right, Gordie?

GORDIE
Absolutely.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
(as the boys resume their journey)
I wondered how Teddy could care so much for his dad who'd practically killed him and I couldn't give a shit one way or the other about my own dad who hadn't laid a hand on me since I was three and that was for eating bleach under the sink.

TEDDY
Hey, if I spoiled your good time, I'm sorry. I guess that was pretty stupid shit back there at the fence.

VERN
I ain't sure I want it to be no good time.

CHRIS
You saying you want to be back, man?

VERN
No, huh-uh! But going to see a dead kid -- it shouldn't be a party, maybe. I mean, if you can dig it. I mean... I could be a little scared. If you get me. If he's really bad, I'll have nightmares about him and think he's under my bed, all cut up in a pool of blood, just eyeballs and hair, but mooovin' somehow, and gettin' ready to grab...

TEDDY
(thickly)
Jesus Christ, what a fuckin' bedtime story.

VERN
Well, I can't help it. But I feel we hafta see him, even if there are bad dreams. You know? Like we hafta. But maybe it shouldn't be no good time.

CHRIS
Yeah. Maybe it shouldn't.

VERN
You won't tell any of the other guys, will you? I'm too old for the boogeyman.

The boys mumble their no's and trudge on.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
It was only a quarter to three, but it felt much later. It was too hot and too much had happened. We weren't even over into Harlow yet. We were going to have to pick them up and lay them down if we were going to make some real miles before dark.

The boys look small and frail in the distance and the sun is so bright off the rails that you see them as white lines when you close your eyes.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON A BARE SHOULDER

A razor blade ENTERS FRAME and begins to scrape the letter "C" into the skin. Above the "C", the word "WILD" has already been etched and blood still seeps through the blue ink that has been applied to the raw flesh.

EXT. YARD - BACK OF ACE MERRILL'S HOUSE - DAY

Ace, with a fresh tattoo on his shoulder that reads "WILDCARDS", is the one wielding the razor blade against Charlie Hogan's shoulder. The RADIO IS ON. ROBIN LUKE is SINGING "SUSIE DARLING". Billy, FUZZY BRACOWICZ, and Eyeball are lolling around the junk-filled yard catching some rays. They all have their shirts off, they all have bloody tattoos that read "WILDCARDS" and they're all drunk out of their minds on beer.

BILLY
She'll let me suck her tits. She'll let me touch her pussy. But that's as far as I can go.

ACE
She's a Catholic. They're all like that. You want to get laid, you gotta get yourself a Protestant or a Jew.

The SONG ENDS.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Coming up next, the search for Ray Brower continues.

EYEBALL
(as a COMMERCIAL COMES ON)
Why don't they grow up? The kid's gone. I'll bet you they never find him, dead or alive.

CHARLIE
(forgetting himself)
I'll bet you a thousand dollars they do.

EYEBALL
I'll bet you.

BILLY
(scared, staggers to his feet)
Eyeball's right, Charlie. They ain't never gonna find him.

EYEBALL
I'll tell you how they're gonna find him. Ten years from now some hunter'll go in the woods to take a piss and there'll be his bones.

CHARLIE
I'll bet you two thousand dollars they find him before that.

EYEBALL
I'll bet you three thousand dollars they don't.

CHARLIE
(loud and triumphant)
Well, asshole, me and...

ACE
Will you two shut the fuck up?
(MORE)

ACE (CONT'D)
If either you assholes had three thousand dollars, I'll kill you both.

Ace raises a cheek and lets out a long, loud fart. Everyone but Charlie laughs.

CHARLIE
(through clenched teeth, to no one in particular)
They're gonna find him.

EXT. RAILROAD TRESTLE - DAY

The rails run across a ridiculously narrow platform of four by sixes supported by long, frail-looking wooden posts and crisscrossing beams. It's fifty feet above the water and 150 yards long. There is no more than eighteen inches between the track and the edge of the trestle. And there is no railing. It's scary.

CHRIS (O.S.)
(softly)
Man.

TEDDY
(walks INTO FRAME)
Come on.
(stepping onto the 4x6's between the rails)
Let's go.

VERN
(uneasily, from the bank)
Say, any of you guys know when the next train's due?

They all shrug.

GORDIE
There's the Route 136 bridge...

TEDDY
Hey, come on, gimme a break. That means walkin' five miles down the river on this side and then five miles back up on the other side... it'll take us until dark. If we go across here, we can get to the same place in ten minutes.

VERN
But if a train comes, there's nowheres to go.

TEDDY
Fuck there isn't.

He swings over the edge and holds onto one of the 4x6s.

TEDDY
See how easy it is?

CHRIS
You tellin' me you're gonna hang on that way if it's a two-hundred-car freight?

TEDDY
(shouts)
You chicken?

CHRIS
No, just askin' what you'd do.

TEDDY
Go around if you want to. Who gives a fuck? I'll wait for you. I'll take a nap.

GORDIE
One train already went by. And there probably isn't any more than one, two trains a day that go through Harlow.

TEDDY
There. See?

GORDIE
But still, there's a chance.

CHRIS
Yeah.

An edgy silence falls over the boys as they think about it. Then, Chris looks at Gordie with a crooked smile.

CHRIS
Dare you, Lachance.

GORDIE
Dares go first.

CHRIS
Okay.
(looks at Teddy and Vern)
Any pussies here?

TEDDY
NO!!

Vern clears his throat, croaks, clears it again.

VERN
(in a small voice)
... no...

CHRIS
Okay.

They hesitate for a moment, then Gordie kneels down and takes one of the steel rails firmly in his hand. It's silent.

GORDIE
Okay.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
As I said that, some guy pole vaulted in my stomach. He dug his pole all the way into my balls, it felt like, and ended up sitting astride my heart.

They file out onto the trestle single file: Chris first, then Teddy, then Vern, then Gordie. We STAY WITH Gordie as he steps onto the trestle. He watches his feet as he goes and between the ties he can see the embankment drop away beneath him and the RUSHING RIVER COME INTO VIEW.

Gordie stops and looks up. Chris and Teddy are a long way ahead, almost out over the middle. Vern is tottering slowly along behind them. Gordie looks back over his shoulder. He's a long way out.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Too far, man. If I went back now, I'd be a pussy for life.

Gordie starts walking again -- the crossties passing under him with a GLIMPSE OF RUNNING WATER between each pair. Sweat runs in rivulets down his body. He wipes it out of his eyes. We BECOME AWARE of the steady THUMP of his HEART. And other noises, like the hot hum of a LOCUST, the CRY OF A CHICKADEE, a BARKING DOG, get BRIGHT AND CLEAR.

The crossties begin to strobe before his eyes. He stumbles and wobbles, throws his arms out for balance, then stops. Sucking deep breaths of air, he looks up at the sky. He can still see phantom crossties in front of his eyes. He blinks once or twice and they fade away and he can see that he's almost caught up with Vern and that Chris and Teddy are almost all the way across. He tries a step, then another...

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I've written books about people who can read minds and precognit the future. But it was on that trestle that I had my first and last psychic flash.

Gordie stops -- like he's hit an invisible shield. His eyes widen. His jaw drops. A wet spot appears in his crotch and a thin stream of urine runs into his right sock.

With his sinews creaking like overtuned violin strings, he forces himself to bend down and make a fist around the rail on his left. It vibrates and thrums in his hand. His mouth opens but no sound comes out.

In SUPER SLOW MOTION Gordie tries to rise. It seems to take him forever, straining and straining upward. Finally, he breaks into a BARE FRAME.

GORDIE
(screams)
TRAIN!!!

Vern's head jerks around for a look back. His face is almost comically distorted with surprise. When he sees Gordie break into a clumsy, shambling run, he knows it's no joke and breaks into a run himself. Gordie takes his eyes off his feet to check how far he has to go and sees Chris step off the ties onto the embankment.

Gordie's left foot almost slips into the yaw beneath him. He flails his arms, gets his balance, and runs on.

Teddy jumps off onto the embankment. Chris drops to his knees and grabs a rail.

Gordie catches up to Vern just past the halfway point and for the first time we HEAR the TRAIN -- the LOW RUMBLE of the diesel and the HIGHER, MORE SINISTER SOUND of BIG GROOVED WHEELS turning heavily on the rails.

VERN
Awwwwwww, shit!

GORDIE
(thumping Vern on the back)
Run, you pussy!

VERN
I can't! I'll fall!

GORDIE
Run faster.

VERN
AWWWWWWWWW, SHIT!!

Hanging onto their bedrolls, their shirts tied around their waists, Vern and Gordie run. Their muscles clench and loosen, clench and loosen. The SOUND of the TRAIN GETS LOUDER.

VERN
AWWWWWWWWW, SHIT!!

GORDIE
RUN FASTER, DICKFACE!

Vern almost misses a crosstie, lunges forward, his arms out. Gordie whacks him on the back to keep him going.

GORDIE
GO FASTER, VERN! FAAASTER!

VERN
I CAN'T!!

But he does. The boys run on, their ribcages rising and falling like the bellows of a blacksmith on a speed trip, clumsily keeping their footing, lurching ahead. The SOUND OF the TRAIN is VERY LOUD NOW. The boys look back. It's coming onto the trestle.

VERN
Oh Gawd Gordie oh Gawd Gordie oh Gawd AWWWWW, SHEEEEEEEEYIT!!!

The freight's ELECTRIC HORN SPANKS the AIR into a hundred pieces with one LONG, LOUD BLAST -- WHHHHHHHONNNNNNK! WHHHHHHHHHONNNNNNNK!

GORDIE
GO, VERN!!! GO!!!

The trestle begins to shake under their feet -- WHHHHHHHHHO NNNNNNK! WHHHHHHHHHHONNNNNNNK!

Then, Chris and Teddy are below them, both shouting a single word. The word is "JUMP", but we can't hear it.

Vern and Gordie jump. They land in the dust and cinders and bury their faces into the hot earth. The freight goes by, METAL SQUALLING AGAINST METAL.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I had no urge to look at that train. But before it had passed completely, I felt a warm hand on my neck and knew it was Chris'.

The train passes, its SOUND FADES. Gordie raises his head. Chris is sitting cross-legged between him and Vern, one hand on Vern's neck, the other still on Gordie's. Vern raises his head. Gordie sits up.

CHRIS
What you guys think if we drink those Cokes? Could anybody use one beside me?

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

At the edge of the clearing, Gordie and Chris and Teddy are sipping their Cokes in the shade of a large spruce. Vern's Coke is standing alone on the ground. He is nowhere to be seen, but his VOICE can be HEARD coming from the bushes behind it.

TEDDY
Train scare you much, Vern?

VERN (O.S.)
No, I was gonna squat when we got across't, anyway. I hadda take a squat, you know?

CHRIS & TEDDY
Verrrrrrrrn?

VERN (O.S.)
Come on, you guys, I did. Sincerely.

TEDDY
Then you won't mind if we examine the seat of your Jockeys for Hershey squirts, willya?

VERN (O.S.)
(laughs)
Go screw.

CHRIS
That train scare you, Gordie?

GORDIE
(cool)
Nope.

CHRIS
(punches his arm)
Not much, you sucker.

GORDIE
Sincerely. I wasn't scared at all.

TEDDY
Yeah? You wasn't scared?

GORDIE
No. I was fuckin' petrified!

This slays Chris and Teddy. Pulling up his pants, Vern comes out of the woods into their laughter.

VERN
What? What's so funny?

TEDDY
Lachance.

And Vern starts to laugh.

CHRIS
(suddenly sitting up)
Hey, tell that story.

GORDIE
(shy)
What story?

VERN
It ain't one of your horror stories, is it, Gordie? I don't want to hear no horror stories. I'm not up for that, man.

CHRIS
No, it ain't horror. It's really funny. Gross but funny. Go on, Gordie. Hammer that fucker to us.

TEDDY
Is it about Le Dio?

CHRIS
No, it ain't a war story, you psycho. It's 'bout this pie eatin' contest.

GORDIE
Hey, I didn't even write it down yet.

CHRIS
Yeah, but tell it.

GORDIE
Well, the main guy of the story is this fat kid nobody likes named Davie Hogan...

VERN
Like Charlie Hogan's brother, if he had one.

CHRIS
(rabbit punches Vern)
Go on, Gordie.

GORDIE
This kid, he's our age, but he's fat. He weighs like one eighty but it's not his fault, it's his glands...

VERN
My cousin's like that. Sincerely. Hyboid gland or something. What a fuckin' blimp!

CHRIS
Will you shut up, Vern?

VERN
Yeah, right! Go on, Gordie. It's a swell story.

GORDIE
All the kids, instead of callin' him Davie, they call him Lard Ass Hogan and rank him out and beat him up whenever they get a chance. So he gets this idea. The greatest revenge idea a kid ever had.

The SCREEN GOES BLACK. FADE IN the following in white letters:

From "The Revenge of Lard Ass Hogan" by Gordon Lachance. Originally published in Cavalier Magazine, March, 1975. Used by permission.

Under the title we HEAR the VOICE OF MAYOR CHARBONNEAU THROUGH a crackly P.A. SYSTEM:

MAYOR
... Okay, Principal John Wiggins...

During the APPLAUSE and the BOOS, we:

FADE OUT TITLE.

FADE IN:

EXT. PLATFORM - NIGHT

(The setting is filtered through a creative mind but the basics are identical to the preparations for the Castle Rock Labor Day picnic that Gordie walked through this morning on his way to the treehouse. There is now an AUDIENCE and PEOPLE on the platform.)

While the MAYOR introduces the next contestant, PRINCIPAL WIGGINS, his hands tied behind his back and wearing a large bib over his shirt front, crosses the stage and sits on a stool behind a long trestle table stacked high with pies. Another contestant, CALVIN SPIER, a beer-bellied man, is already in place. Below the loops of bare 100-watt bulbs, a banner which reads: THE GREAT GRETNA PIE-EAT hangs over the platform.

MAYOR
And now our celebrity guest from WLAM in Lewiston, Bob Cormier.

He gets a bigger hand and some squeals from the teenage GIRLS in the audience. BOB, his hands tied behind his back, steps up to the microphone.

BOB
(DJ voice)
This is WLAM in Lewiston. Bob Cormier here bringing you the super hits and the boss oldies.

As the Mayor bibs him, we meet DAVIE HOGAN. Standing at the top of the stairs, he is smaller than we imagined. But still a hefty twelve year old. Behind him is the last contestant, BILL TRAVIS, 6 foot 5 and lanky.

MAYOR
And now a new participant in the annual Great Gretna Pie-Eat, but one we expect great things from in the future... young master David Hogan.

A rehearsed CHORUS OF KIDS cries out in unison.

CHORUS OF KIDS
Go-get-'em-Lard-Ass!!!

This causes muffled shrieks of laughter, which increase when somebody's pet Pekingese rushes out of the audience and begins snapping at Lard Ass's ankle.

VOICE
Oh God, he's gonna eat the dog.

This brings down the house. Without changing expression, Lard Ass scans the faces laughing at his expense. The Mayor has to smother a laugh himself as he slips the bib over Lard Ass's head.

MAYOR
Don't pay any attention to those fools.

Lard Ass's stomach burbles. The Mayor gives it a quick glance. Lard Ass smiles knowingly at him.

MAYOR
David Hogan.

As Lard Ass crosses to the table, the rehearsed chorus of kids accompanies his every step with:

CHORUS OF KIDS
Boom-Ba-Ba-Boom-Ba-Ba-Boom...

MAYOR
(interrupting the laughter)
And now the man you've all been waiting for. Four-time defending champeen, Gretna's own Bill Travis.

The audience goes crazy: "Hoo, Bill!" "How many you goin' through tonight?" "I'm countin' on you, Bill." On stage the Mayor leans in and speaks out of the corner of his mouth to Bill.

MAYOR
I got a ten on you, Billy-Boy.

Bill winks back.

VOICE
Save me one of those pies, Trav.

Suddenly, the sound stops. We are ON the STAGE. The five men: Travis, Lard Ass, Cormier, Wiggins, and Spier all have pies in front of them. Their eyes are on Mayor Charbonneau.

MAYOR
Are you ready?

THE 5 PIE EATERS
Yes.

MAYOR
Are you set?

THE 5 PIE EATERS
Yes.

CHORUS OF KIDS
Scoff up those fucking pies, Lard Ass.

Flustered, the Mayor manages to blush, smile, and look furious all at the same time. Finally, he raises a pudgy hand and then drops it.

MAYOR
GO!!!

Five heads drop into five pie plates. The sound is like five large feet stamping firmly into mud. Wet chomping noises rise on the mild night air and then are blotted out as the partisans in the crowd begin to cheer on their favorites.

Lard Ass's jaws machine gun up the top crust. Then, a huge sucking sound issues from between his lips. It's like the sound of an industrial vacuum cleaner going to work. Then, his whole head disappears into the pie plate.

Cormier stops eating and looks at him in amazement. Lard Ass raises his face out of the pie. His cheeks and forehead are smeared with blueberry juice. He looks like an extra in a minstrel show. He nods to indicate he's done.

There's startled applause as the Mayor examines Lard Ass's pie plate and pronounces it clean enough. Bill Travis hasn't even finished half his first pie. Lard Ass goes after his second pie even more furiously than the first — his head bobbing and smooching in the soft blueberry filling.

Bill Travis throws him a worried glance as he calls for his second blueberry pie and, diving in, redoubles his efforts to catch him. But if Travis redoubles, Lard Ass trebles.

Blueberries fly from his second pie dish. There are blueberries in his hair, blueberries on his bib, blueberries standing out on his forehead.

LARD ASS
Done!

Bill Travis hasn't even consumed the crust on his new pie.

MAYOR
(after a glance at Bill)
Better slow down, boy. You got to pace yourself if you want to hold out.

Ignoring him, Lard Ass tears into his third pie with lunatic speed, jaws moving with lightning rapidity. In record time he's finished.

LARD ASS
Done!

Another pie is put in front of him. He's one full pie ahead of Bill Travis. Sensing a new and unexpected champ in the making, the crowd begins to cheer him on lustily.

CROWD
Go, Lard Ass! Go! Go! Go! Go!

GORDIE (V.O.)
What they didn't know was that Lard Ass didn't want to win. He wanted revenge. And earlier that evening he'd gotten ready for it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BATHROOM - EVENING

With the CROWD STILL CHANTING "GO! GO! GO!", Lard Ass floats across the linoleum in SLOW MOTION. He opens the medicine cabinet, takes out a bottle of yellow liquid labeled Castor Oil and glug, glug, glug, empties it down his throat. Then, he looks INTO the CAMERA, sticks out his tongue, and licks the last remaining drops off the rim.

LARD ASS (V.O.)
Done.

EXT. PLATFORM - NIGHT

The empty pie pan is taken away and a fresh pie is put in front of Lard Ass. He drops his face into it.

GORDIE (V.O.)
Racing through his fourth pie, Lard Ass began to deliberately imagine he wasn't eating pies at all; he was eating cowflops. He was eating great big gobs of greasy grimy gopher guts. He was eating diced-up woodchuck intestines with blueberry sauce poured over them.

Lard Ass's STOMACH GRUMBLES.

GORDIE (V.O.)
Rancid blueberry sauce.

The GRUMBLING GETS LOUDER.

LARD ASS
Done!

AUDIENCE
GO! GO! GO! GO!

Without taking his head out of his pie, Bill Travis looks at Lard Ass. A fifth pie is put in front of him. Lard Ass's chin breaks the crust, he snuffs blueberries up his nose. Blueberries go down his shirt. All sounds except the GRUMBLING FROM HIS STOMACH fade. That GETS LOUDER. It's like something big rushing TOWARD US.

Leaving his unfinished pie, Lard Ass grins at Bill Travis with blue teeth. The NOISE FROM HIS STOMACH now sounds like a six-ton Peterbilt shooting through a tunnel. Suddenly, puke roars out of his mouth in a huge blue and yellow glurt; it covers Bill Travis.

TRAVIS
(overwhelmed)
Goog!

Women in the audience scream. Calvin Spier, who has watched this unannounced event with a numb and surprised expression on his face, leans conversationally over the table as if to explain to the gaping audience just what is happening and pukes on the head on MARGUERITE CHARBONBEAU -- the Mayor's wife.

She screams and backs away, pawing futilely at her hair which is covered with chewed blueberry pie. Marguerite turns to her good friend, MARIA LAVIN, and throws up on the front of Maria's buckskin jacket.

In rapid succession: Bill Travis, his face proclaiming "Man, I just can't believe I'm doing this", blows a great jet of vomit over the first row of spectators.

Hit by a generous portion of Bill Travis' surprise gift, CHUCK DAY throws up all over his Hush Puppies. John Wiggins opens his blue-lined mouth and barfs on the remaining pies.

In the audience, while others are throwing up around her, MISS NORMAN, a prim old Latin teacher, keeps her gorge down with a white-gloved hand over her mouth.

On stage, Mayor Charbonneau opens his mouth to call the whole thing off.

MAYOR
Really, this has... YURRK!

He upchucks all over the microphone. Lard Ass beams happily at the audience. Puke is everywhere. People stagger around in drunken circles, holding their throats and making weak cawing noises.

The Pekingese runs past the stage, yapping crazily, and a man wearing jeans and a Western-style silk shirt throws up on it, nearly drowning it.

This does it for Miss Norman. She opens her purse and daintly pukes into it. Lard Ass takes the slightly tacky microphone from the trembling hand of Mayor Charbonneau.

LARD ASS
I declare this contest a draw.

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

GORDIE
Then he puts the mike down, walks off the back of the platform, and goes straight home.

Gordie downs the last swallow in his Coke and tosses it into the woods.

TEDDY
(eagerly)
Yeah, that's cool, then what happened?

GORDIE
I don't know.

TEDDY
What do you mean, you don't know?

GORDIE
It means it's the end. When you don't know what happens next, that's the end.

VERN
Whaaaat? How'd it come out?

CHRIS
You have to use your imagination.

VERN
No, I ain't! He's supposed to use his imagination! He made up the fuckin' story!

GORDIE
(resigned)
I think his dad was at the Pie Eat and when he came home he beat the living crap out of Lard Ass.

TEDDY
(after a pause)
That ending sucks.

GORDIE
That's why I didn't want to tell it.

TEDDY
You could have made it so he shot his father and ran away and joined the Texas Rangers. How about that?

Gordie and Chris exchange a glance.

GORDIE
I guess so. Sorry you didn't like this story better.

TEDDY
Nah, it was good. Right up to the end, it was good. All that pukin' was really good.

VERN
Yeah, that was cool, really gross. But Teddy's right about the ending. It was sort of a gyp.

GORDIE
(sighs)
Yeah.

CHRIS
(stands up)
Let's do some walking.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - AFTERNOON

Chris and Gordie are walking side by side on the cinders. Gordie slaps a mosquito off his neck. Chris has his hands in his pockets, his shirt slapping against his knees and thighs like an apron. Vern and Teddy are quite aways ahead.

CHRIS
I got some Winstons. Hawked 'em off my old man's dresser. One apiece. For after supper.

GORDIE
Yeah? That's boss.

CHRIS
That's when a cigarette tastes best. After supper.

GORDIE
Right.

They walk on in silence.

CHRIS
Are you gonna write it down? The story?

GORDIE
Probably. But not for awhile. I can't write 'em down right after I tell 'em. It'll keep.

CHRIS
What Vern said? About the ending being a gyp?

GORDIE
Yeah?

CHRIS
Life's a gyp, you know it? I mean, look at us.

GORDIE
Nah, we have a great time.

CHRIS
Sure. All the fuckin' time, you wet.

They both laugh.

CHRIS
You'll be a great writer someday, Gordie.

GORDIE
No, I don't think so.

CHRIS
Yeah, you will. Maybe you'll even write about us guys if you ever get hard up for material.

GORDIE
Have to be pretty fuckin' hard up.

CHRIS
(after another period of silence)
You ready for school?

Gordie shrugs.

CHRIS
Junior High. And you know what, Gordie? By next June, we'll all be quits.

GORDIE
What are you talking about? Why would that happen?

CHRIS
It's not gonna be like grammar school, that's why. You'll be in the college courses. Me and Teddy and Vern, we'll all be in the shop courses with the rest of the retards, making ashtrays and birdhouses. You'll meet a lot of new guys. Smart guys. That's how they got it set up.

GORDIE
Meet a lot of pussies is what you mean.

CHRIS
(grabs Gordie's arm)
No, man. Don't say that. Don't even think that. They'll get your stories. Not like Vern and Teddy.

GORDIE
(pulling away)
Fuck the stories. I'm not going in with a lot of pussies. No sir.

CHRIS
If you don't, then you're an asshole.

GORDIE
What's asshole about wanting to be with your friends?

CHRIS
It's asshole if your friends can drag you down. I know about you and your folks. They don't give a shit about you. Your big brother was the one they cared about. And don't try to tell me different. I've met them.

Gordie is stunned. He looks at Chris, then turns away and lengthens his stride till he is the one slightly ahead.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I couldn't tell him different. It's scary to find that someone else, even a friend, knows exactly how things are with you.

The sun, lower now, comes at them through the overlacing trees in broken, dusty shafts, turning everything to gold.

CHRIS
(catching up)
You're just a kid, Gordie.

GORDIE
Gee, thanks, Dad.

CHRIS
I wish to fuck I was your father! You wouldn't go around talking about takin' those stupid shop courses if I was! It's like God gave you something, all those stories you can make up, and He said: This is what we got for you, kid. Try not to lose it. But kids lose everything unless somebody looks out for them and if your folks are too fucked up to do it, then maybe I ought to.

The tracks stretch ahead of them in the gloom that is just starting to gather. By now Vern and Teddy are at least a half mile ahead.

CHRIS
(soft and flat)
Those stories you tell, they're no good to anybody but you, Gordie. If you go along with us just because you don't want the gang to break up, you'll wind up just another grunt, making C's to get on the teams. You'll get to High and take the same fuckin' shop courses and throw erasers and pull your meat along with the rest of the grunts. Get detentions. Fuckin' suspensions. And after awhile all you'll care about is gettin' a car so you can take some skag to the hops or down to the fuckin' Twin Bridges Tavern. Then you'll knock her up and spend the rest of your life in the mill or some fuckin' shoeshop in Auburn or maybe even up to Hillcrest pluckin' chickens. And that pie story will never get written down. Nothin'll get written down. 'Cause you'll just be another wiseguy with shit for brains.

Gordie tries to look at him, but Chris takes a deep breath and looks at his shoes.

CHRIS
I know what people think of my family in this town. I know what they think of me and what they expect. Nobody even asked me if I took the milk money that time. I just got a three-day vacation.

GORDIE
Did you take it?

CHRIS
Yeah. Yeah, I took it.
(he looks ahead at Vern and Teddy)
You knew I took it. Teddy knew. Everybody knew. Even Vern knew, I think.

Gordie opens his mouth and closes it.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
He was right. No matter what I might have said to my parents, I had known.

CHRIS
Then maybe I was sorry and tried to give it back.

GORDIE
You tried to give it back?!

CHRIS
Maybe. Just maybe. And maybe I took it to old lady Simons and told her, and maybe the money was all there, but I got a three-day vacation anyway, because the money never showed up. And maybe the next week old lady Simons had this brand-new skirt on when she came to school.

GORDIE
It was a light brown paisley! Sorta full!

CHRIS
Just maybe.

GORDIE
Chris, how much was that milk money?

CHRIS
Almost seven bucks.

GORDIE
Christ.

CHRIS
So just say that I stole the milk money, but then old lady Simons stole it from me. Just suppose I told that story. Me, Chris Chambers. Kid brother of Frank Chambers and Eyeball Chambers. You think anybody would have believed it?

GORDIE
No way. Jesus Christ!

CHRIS
And do you think that bitch would have dared try something like that if it had been one of those dootchbags from up on The View that had taken the money?

GORDIE
No.

CHRIS
But with me... well, maybe she had her eye on that skirt for a long time. Anyway, she saw her chance and she took it. I was the stupid one for even trying to give that money back. But I never thought... I never thought that a teacher... oh, who gives a fuck, anyway? Why am I even talking about it?

Chris swipes an arm angrily across his eyes and we REALIZE he is crying.

GORDIE
(after a long pause)
Chris, why don't you go into the college courses? You're smart enough.

CHRIS
(angry, still fighting tears)
I can't. Don't you understand? They won't let me. I want to go someplace where nobody knows me and I don't have any black marks against me before I start. But I don't know if I can do it.

GORDIE
Why not?

CHRIS
People. People drag you down.

GORDIE
Who?

CHRIS
Your friends drag you down, Gordie. Don't you know that?

He points to Vern and Teddy, who are waiting for them to catch up. They are laughing about something: in fact, Vern is just about busting a gut.

CHRIS
Your friends do. They're like drowning guys that are holding onto your legs. You can't save them. You can only drown with them.

VERN
(still laughing, shouts)
Come on, you fuckin' slowpokes!

CHRIS
(starts to run)
Yeah, comin'!

GORDIE
Chris...

Chris doesn't stop and he catches up to Vern and Teddy before Gordie catches up to him and, their arms over each other's shoulders, the boys walk four abreast down the tracks into the sunset.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON A PILE OF TWIGS AND DRY MOSS

A hand with a lighted match reaches in, but the match dies before it touches the kindling.

EXT. CAMPSITE - TWILIGHT

Vern is the one with the matches. Chris and Teddy are on either side of him. Gordie is whittling points on four thin green branches.

CHRIS
Oh shit, Vern, you're gonna use up all the matches.

TEDDY
I can make a fire by rubbing two sticks together.

CHRIS
You're so full of shit.

Vern applies a match to the moss and it bursts into FLAMES.

EXT. CAMPSITE - TWILIGHT

Vern alone is holding a piece of hamburger on the end of a green branch over the FIRE that is beginning to die down. The other three boys are already scarfing up the hamburgers they've cooked.

VERN
We should have waited for the coals.

Teddy wipes the grease off his mouth and burps at him. Chris' burp tops Teddy's and Gordie's tops his.

EXT. CAMPSITE - TWILIGHT

The fire is now embers. Gordie, Chris, Vern, and Teddy are arranged around it on their bedrolls, smoking. Not inhaling, just puffing.

VERN
Nothin' like a smoke after a meal.

TEDDY
Fucking-A.

Chris hawks into the fire and we HEAR the SPIT SIZZLE. Red fire shadows play across the boys' faces.

EXT. CAMPSITE - TWILIGHT

The glowing embers are just a pinpoint of light in the MIDDLE OF THE SCREEN and the boys are just vague silhouettes around it.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
As the dark drew down, we talked the kind of talk you can never quite remember once you get past fifteen and discover girls... Not one of us mentioned Ray Brower, but we were all thinking about him.

A falling star shoots across the sky. A TELEPHONE RINGS O.S.

EXT. TESSIO HOUSE - NIGHT

We are LOOKING IN the KITCHEN WINDOW. Vern's Mother, in pedal pushers and a bra, is washing her hair in the sink. The PHONE on the table between the kitchen and the living room CONTINUES TO RING.

VERN'S MOTHER
Phone's ringing.

INT. TESSIO HOUSE - NIGHT

Vern's Father is sitting in the living room watching TV with popcorn and beer. THROUGH an OPEN DOORWAY, we can SEE Vern's Mother in the kitchen.

VERN'S MOTHER
I'm washing my hair.

VERN'S FATHER
I'm watching TV.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

VERN'S MOTHER
(under her breath)
Shithead!

She grabs a towel and, dripping shampoo suds, pads over to the phone.

VERN'S MOTHER
(sweetly lilting)
He-ll-oo.

INT. HALLWAY - TEDDY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mrs. Duchamp (Teddy's mother) is on the phone.

MRS. DUCHAMP
Hi, Mrs. Tessio. This is Mrs. Duchamp. Is everything all right?

INTERCUT WITH Vern's Mother.

VERN'S MOTHER
What?

MRS. DUCHAMP
I think my son Teddy is camping out with Vern in your back yard.

VERN'S MOTHER
Oh... eh... eh...

She twists around to look through the living room window into the back yard.

VERN'S MOTHER
Well, there's a tent out there with a light on in it.

MRS. DUCHAMP
Oh God! I hope they're not smoking.

VERN'S MOTHER
It looks like a flashlight.

MRS. DUCHAMP
You think maybe you could go out and see if they're okay?

VERN'S MOTHER
(makes a face at the phone and lies)
Darling, they were all in here a few minutes ago using the bathroom. They're probably sound asleep by now.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The four boys are huddled together on Chris' bedroll quaking under a LONG and HOLLOW SCREAM OF AGONY that rises out of the woods toward the sliver of moon.

VERN
Oh, God!!!

TEDDY
(whispers)
It's that Brower kid. His ghost's out walkin' in the woods.

VERN
(screams)
Oh God! I promise I won't hawk no more dirty books. I promise I won't say no bad swears. I promise...

CHRIS
Shut up, Vern.

ANOTHER SCREAM comes from the woods. CLOSER THIS TIME. It sounds kinda like a woman dying of extreme fear.

GORDIE
It's a bird, isn't it?

CHRIS
I think it's a wildcat... Sounds like a woman, doesn't it?

TEDDY
It's his ghost.
(starts to get up)
I'm gonna go look for it.

Chris and Gordie grab him and roughly pull him down.

TEDDY
(hisses)
Let me up, fuckheads. I'm gonna go look for it. I wanna see the ghost. I wanna see if...

The WILD SOBBING CRY RISES into the night AGAIN, cutting the air like a knife with a crystal blade. Gordie and Chris freeze, their hands stuck to a frozen Teddy. The SCREAM CLIMBS with a crazy ease through OCTAVE AFTER OCTAVE, finally REACHING A GLASSY EDGE. It hangs there for a moment and then whirls back down, disappearing into an impossible BASS REGISTER. This is followed by a BURST OF what sounds like MAD LAUGHTER... and then there is silence again.

TEDDY
(whispers)
Jesus H. Baldheaded Christ.

CHRIS
(after a long, long pause)
I think we better stand guard.

TEDDY
I think that's a good idea.

VERN
I'll go first.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Vern is sitting cross-legged by the husk of the campfire with Chris' .45 in his lap. The other boys are on their bedrolls watching him.

VERN
I'm not going to fall asleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Chris is sitting by the fire with the gun. The other boys are restlessly asleep. We MOVE IN ON Gordie's face.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WHITE'S BEACH - DAY

A gravel pit that's been turned into a miniature lake. Chris and Gordie are swimming between the float and the beach. Behind them are the YELLS and LAUGHTER of KIDS climbing on and diving off the float. FROM CHRIS AND GORDIE'S POV, we SEE the oiled bodies laying on the beach. YOUNG GIRLS promenading back and forth in pairs and trios. PEOPLE going to and from the snackbar.

A severe-looking blue-haired LADY in a gray two-piece suit with a thick sweater instead of a blouse under her jacket, and support hose the color of Canada Mints on her legs, drifts past Chris and Gordie on an inflatable rubber raft. Her high-heeled shoes trail in the water, making small V's. Her glasses flash brutally in the sun.

LADY
Watch your steps, boys! Now, Mr. Chambers, 'Mending Wall', if you please. By rote.

CHRIS
I tried to give the money back. Old lady Simons said okay, but she took it! Do you hear me? She took it! Now what are you going to do about that?

LADY
'Mending Wall', Mr. Chambers, if you please. By rote.

Chris throws Gordie a despairing glance, then begins to tread water and recite.

CHRIS
'Something there is that doesn't love a wall, that sends the frozen-ground-swell under it...'

Abruptly, his head disappears underwater. His arms flail and his head pops back up. He is choking.

CHRIS
Help me, Gordie! Help me!

He is dragged under again. Looking into the clear water, Gordie can see two bloated, naked corpses holding Chris' ankles. One is Vern and the other is Teddy, and their open eyes are as blank and pupilless as the eyes of Greek statues. Chris' head breaks the surface again. He stretches a hand out to Gordie and screams. A scream that rises and rises, ululating in the hot sunny air. Gordie looks at the beach but nobody has heard.

THE LIFEGUARD

just keeps on talking to a GIRL in a red bathing suit. Chris' scream turns into a bubbling, water-choked gurgle as the corpses pull him under again. Gordie can see Chris' eyes pleading for help, but instead of diving down and trying to save him, he begins to stroke madly for shore. Before he can even get close, a rotted hand reaches up and wraps itself around his calf and begins to pull. Gordie's mouth opens to scream.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Gordie snaps out of his nightmare to find that it is Teddy who has a hand on his leg shaking him awake.

GORDIE
You alive, Teddy?

TEDDY
No. I'm dead and you're a turd in a toilet.

Gordie sits up and dry washes his face, trying to rub away the dream.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DAWN

The gun gleams dully on one of the rails. Gordie is seated next to it reading his Vampire comic while behind him the morning is pushing the night out of the sky. He is in no hurry to awaken the other boys sleeping around the dead fire below him.

A SLIGHT NOISE to his right causes him to look in that direction and he finds himself staring into the dark, dusty, black eyes of a young deer. She looks serenely at him, her head slightly lowered in curiosity. What she sees is a mesmerized kid with his hair in a sleep-scarecrow of whirls and many-tined cowlicks, wearing jeans with cuffs and a brown khaki shirt with the elbows mended and the collar turned up.

They look at each other for a long time, then with an insouciant flip of her white bobtail, she turns and walks off to the other side of the tracks. Gordie's eyes follow her. She finds some grass and begins to crop. Not daring to breathe, Gordie continues to watch her. Then the rail starts to thrum under the gun and he's suddenly afraid for her.

The doe's head comes up, cocked back toward Castle Rock. Her nose works the air, coaxing it a little. Then she is gone in three gangling leaps, vanishing into the woods without a sound.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DAWN

As the freight clatters by, we LOOK UNDER IT FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACK AT Chris, Vern, and Teddy waking up and shaking out the night willies.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The freight woke up the other guys and it was on the tip of my tongue to tell them about the deer, but I ended up not doing it. That was one thing I kept to myself. I've never spoken or written of it until just now, today. But for me it was the best part of the trip, the cleanest part. It was my moment.

EXT. TRACKSIDE - MORNING

The boys are foraging through the underbrush picking and eating a breakfast of blackberries.

VERN
God, a couple fried eggs, some bacon, some toasts, would sure be great right now.

TEDDY
What about some waffles with butter and lots of syrup? And a Coke.

Gordie's STOMACH gives a LOUD GRUMBLE.

GORDIE
Shut up, you guys.

CHRIS
Big fat juicy sausages with mashed potatoes and fried onions.

All the BOYS' STOMACHS BEGIN TO RUMBLE.

GORDIE
Shut up.

VERN
Fried bologna and eggs with homefried potatoes. And orange juice.

TEDDY
Blueberry pancakes with strawberry jam and...

SPLAT! A blackberry explodes on his chest. He looks at Gordie.

TEDDY
You wet!

Gordie laughs and throws another one at him, which splatters on his cheek. Gordie is hit by a barrage from Chris and Vern. The fight is on. Now they're not foraging for food, they're foraging for ammunition. The carnage is indiscriminate. SPLAT! SPLAT! SPLAT! SPLAT! SPLAT!

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - LATER THAT MORNING

The sun is beating down relentlessly. Under it the four boys, grimy, sweaty, and polka-dotted with blackberry splatters, are chugging along with grim determination.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
With our stomachs rumbling we pressed on. Our obsession with Ray Brower kept us walking faster than we had any business doing in that heat. We had to see that kid's body. I think by then we had come to believe we deserved to see it.

EXT. BEAVER POND - DAY

The surface of the pond brilliantly mirrors the sky. Looking down on it from the tracks are Gordie, Chris, Teddy, and Vern. They're all panting slightly and sweat rolls down their chests and backs, leaving clean streaks through the accumulated soot and grime.

VERN
(hungrily)
You think it's deep enough to swim in?

CHRIS
One way to find out.

With a WHOOP! he runs down the bank, kicking off his sneakers and untying his shirt from around his waist with a jerk. He pushes his pants and undershorts down with a single shove of his thumbs. He balances, first on one leg and then the other, to get his socks. Then he makes a shallow dive. He comes up shaking his head to get his wet hair out of his eyes.

CHRIS
(shouts)
It's fucking great!

TEDDY
How deep?

Chris stands up in the water. His shoulders break the surface and we SEE a long, blackish-grayish slimy something moving on one of them.

CHRIS
Come on in, you chickens!

He turns and breaststrokes across the pool. Vern is the next one in, then Gordie, then Teddy. Gordie swims across to Chris and stands up and they grin into each other's faces.

GORDIE & CHRIS
(same instant)
Boss!

CHRIS
Fuckin' jerkoff!

He splashes water in Gordie's face and swims off.

UNDERWATER

We SEE a dark, slimy thing attach itself to Gordie's leg.

MONTAGE

of the boys horsing around, splashing each other, swimming and ducking each other. On the surface it looks lyrical but UNDER THE WATER we SEE that more and more of the dark, slimy things are attaching themselves to the boys' bodies.

The fun and games end when Vern does a handstand in the shallow water. As his legs rise in a shaky but triumphant V, Teddy screams in horror. Chris and Gordie turn to look. Their faces go gray. Vern's legs are covered with the dark, slimy things.

TEDDY
(screams)
LEECHES!!!!

Teddy climbs out of the water and goes into an hysterical paroxysm as he begins to rip the leeches off his naked body. Chris and Gordie thrash their way to the shore. Vern's head comes up and he looks at them, puzzled.

VERN
What the hell's wrong with y...?

TEDDY
Leeches! Dirty mother-fucking bloodsuckers!

He pulls two of them off his thighs and throws them just about as far as he can.

VERN
OhGodOhGodOhGod!!

The boys' terror kicks US INTO A STROBE SLOW-MOTION that has a BREATHLESS QUALITY. In a SERIES OF CUTS, we WATCH them frantically rip the leeches off their bodies. Chris turns his back to Gordie.

CHRIS
Gordie?

Even the VOICES ARE SLOW AND DISTORTED.

CHRIS
Are there anymore? Take 'em off if there are, please, Gordie!

There are more -- five or six running down his back like buttons. Gordie pulls them off and brushes more off his own legs. Chris pulls them off Gordie's back. The leeches have all been removed and the boys are beginning to relax and we're RETURNING TO NORMAL SPEED when Gordie looks down at himself and sees the granddaddy of all leeches clinging to his testicles.

Its body has swelled to four times its normal size and it is so full of blood it is purplish-red. Gordie whimpers and brushes at it with the back of his hand. It holds on. He turns to Chris and tries to speak but can't. He points instead. Chris' cheeks go whiter still.

GORDIE
I can't get it off. You... can you...

CHRIS
(backing away)
I can't, Gordie. I'm sorry but I can't. No. Oh. No.

He twists away and is sick in a stand of juniper bushes. Gordie reaches down and picks off the leech. It bursts between his fingers and his own blood splatters across his palm and down his wrist. Vern runs up and begins to twirl in front of him like an insane dancer on a carnival stage.

VERN
They off, Gordie? They off me?
They off me? They off? Huh?
Huh? They off me, Gordie?

Gordie's eyes roll up in his head and he faints.

DISSOLVE THROUGH BLACK TO:

GORDIE'S POV

OF Chris, Vern, and Teddy's faces floating over him. Their words come in gentle OSCILLATIONS.

BOYS
... not dead... loss of blood...
the sun...

Everything WHITES OUT. CHRIS' VOICE BRINGS US BACK.

CHRIS
Can you hear me, Gordie? Are
you there, man?

GORDIE (V.O.)
Yeah...

His VIEW JIGGLES as he tries to rise.

EXT. BEAVER POND

The boys help Gordie into a sitting position, then rock back and watch concerned as he blinks and shakes his head to clear the cobwebs.

TEDDY
We better take him back, man.

GORDIE
No... I don't want to go back.
We should be getting close now...

Chris hands him the canteen and Gordie takes a shaky drink.

VERN
Why'd you faint, Gordie?

GORDIE
Made a bad mistake and looked at
your face.

TEDDY
(cackles and gets to
his feet)
Eeee-eee-eee! Fuckin' Gordie!
You wet!

CHRIS
(leans in close)
You really okay?

GORDIE
Yeah. Sure.

EXT. TREETOP - DAY

We're LOOKING OVER CHRIS' SHOULDER AT the railroad tracks curving around a row of low bluffs and a ribbon of river in the distance. Clouds are piling up on the horizon.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
We weren't as close as I thought. When we started out we figured we would hit the Royal by noon of the second day. Well, noon had come and gone and we hadn't hit the Royal.

CHRIS
(shouts down to his three buddies waiting on the tracks)
I can see it.

GORDIE
How far?

CHRIS
I don't think we'll get there till around four o'clock. And only then if we really hump along.

TEDDY
Aw shit! So what are we gonna do now?

CHRIS
(after a pause)
It's still closer out going ahead.

INT. POOL HALL - DAY

A dingy two-table place with an OWNER more interested in the BASEBALL GAME ON A BLACK-AND-WHITE TV than in Charlie and Ace, who are playing eight ball and drinking beer.

CHARLIE
(lining up a shot)
Ace, I want to tell you something, but you gotta swear on your mother's name that you'll never tell anybody.

ACE
(cool)
You got it, pal.

EXT. BOOM ROAD BRIDGE - DAY

Billy is fishing next to JACK MUDGETT, one of the other j.d.'s in the town.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Billy and Charlie had managed to keep their enormous secret for just about thirty-six hours. A personal record for both of them.

BILLY
Jack, I want to tell you something, but you gotta swear on your mother's name that you'll never tell anybody.

JACK
You got it, pal.

EXT. POOL HALL - DAY

Billy Tessio, Charlie Hogan, Jack Mudgett, Norman "Fuzzy" Bracowicz, VINCE DESJARDINS, Eyeball Chambers, and Ace Merrill are gathered in the parking lot around Ace's '52 Ford and Vince's pink '54 Studebaker.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
By noon Ace and Jack had told their secret to everybody in the gang. I guess that just goes to show you what those assholes thought about their mothers.

ACE
(from the fender of his car)
Look, all we gotta do is take a lot of fishing gear up there with us and when the cops ask us what we were doing there, we just say 'Hey, Officer, we was just planning to take a few pickerel out of the Royal and... heh, heh, heh, "Look what we found"...'

FUZZY
We're gonna be fuckin' heroes! We're gonna be on every fuckin' radio and TV show in the country!

BILLY
Ace, maybe me and Charlie shouldn't go.

ACE
(casual authority)
I think it would be a good idea if you did.

BILLY & CHARLIE
Okay. Yeah.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

The boys are stretched out in single file under a sky that is filling with clouds. Chris is in the lead and they're humping along. A puff of WIND ruffles the boy's hair.

TEDDY
Is it gonna rain, Gordie?

GORDIE
I think so.

TEDDY
Pisser! The pisser good end to a pisser good day.

GORDIE
Just so long it doesn't rain leeches.

Teddy laughs -- Eeee-eee-eee.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - LATER

A thunderhead blots out the sun and the boys are thrown into shadow.

VERN
(mumbles loud enough for the others to hear)
We should have hitchhiked. We would have been there and back by now.

This stops the other boys and they turn and look at him.

TEDDY
You're such a fuckin' pussy, Vern.

VERN
Crybaby!

Teddy's eyes go wide behind his glasses.

TEDDY
You piece of shit!

He leaps at Vern and swings. The blow catches Vern on the neck and knocks him down. Chris grabs Teddy from behind and holds him.

CHRIS
Stop it, Teddy! Stop it!

TEDDY
Nobody calls me that and lives.

VERN
(scrambling to his feet)
You fuckin' psycho! I'll break your neck!

He lunges for Teddy. Gordie grabs him.

GORDIE
Come on, Vern! Come on!

TEDDY
You chicken shit, asshole!

VERN
You stupid cocksucker!

GORDIE
Shut up, Vern.

VERN
You're all stupid. You're all fuckin' stupid!

CHRIS
(angry)
You wanna go back, Vern?! Go back! We don't want you with us.

GORDIE
Hey, man, this whole thing was Vern's idea.

CHRIS
You chickening out, too, Lachance?

Gordie glares at Chris. Their eyes lock and hold. Then:

GORDIE
Fuck you guys.

He brushes by Chris and heads down the tracks, alone. A beat, then with a glance at Vern, Chris and Teddy follow. Vern watches them go, then looks around at the gathering storm and runs to catch up.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
What Vern didn't understand is that there's a high ritual to all fundamental events, the rites of passage, the magic corridor where the change happens. Our corridor was those twin rails and we were walking between them to see a dead kid our age. You don't hitchhike your way to a thing like that. A thing like that is serious business.

EXT. ROUTE 7 - DAY

Pulling Vince Desjardins' pink Studebaker along in his slipstream, Ace whips his Ford through the light holiday traffic. Empty BEER BOTTLES fly out of both cars and SHATTER on the pavement.

INT. ACE'S FORD - DAY

It's Ace behind the wheel, Charlie and Billy on the seat beside him -- they're subdued but uneasy. The back seat is covered with fishing equipment.

Using a churchkey, Charlie pops the top off another beer and hands it to Ace. He pops one for himself and hangs the churchkey on the rear view mirror. The pink Studebaker tries to slingshot past them. With an evil grin, Ace smashes his accelerator to the floor.

EXT. ROUTE 7 - DAY

The Ford jumps forward, forcing the Studebaker to hang out in the oncoming lane. We can SEE Vince Desjardin grimacing behind the wheel. Next to him, Fuzzy and Eyeball are yelling obscenities and flipping the bird to their buddies in the Ford. Jack Mudgett is doing the same thing from the back seat. The Studebaker goes ahead, the Ford goes ahead, the Studebaker catches up.

An oncoming car appears around a turn. Its HORN SOUNDS. Vince pushes his car ahead, but Ace won't give him a break. The oncoming CAR SOUNDS its HORN AGAIN.

It's getting awfully close. Vince tries one more time... he can't make it. He touches the brakes at the last second and swerves in behind Ace.

INT. FORD - DAY

Ace looks at Billy and Charlie.

ACE
I won.

He coolly takes a sip of beer.

EXT. SKY - AFTERNOON

A jagged fork of lightning licks down from the underside of one of the clouds.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - AFTERNOON

A long, shaking BLAST OF THUNDER ROLLS OVER the boys. Instinctively, they cringe and walk on. Suddenly through a break in the trees, they can see a wide stretch of running water.

CHRIS
That's it! That's the Royal!

The sun sails behind another cloud bank and this time it doesn't come out. The river turns from gold to purple and the day becomes gloomy.

CHRIS
The Brower kid should be around here someplace.

EXT. SKY - AFTERNOON

Another bolt of lightning shoots out of the clouds.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - AFTERNOON

The light flashes on the boys, now walking in pairs again, each two scanning a side of the railroad embankment. A bolt of lightning seems to explode directly overhead. Gordie cries out and claps a hand over his eyes. We HEAR the RENDING FALL OF SOME BIG TREE not sixty yards away and even we can feel the crack of THUNDER that follows.

VERN
Jeezis!! Oh my Jeezis Chrise, lookit that!!

The others look in the direction he is pointing to see a blue-white FIREBALL bowling its way up the left-hand rail of the GS&WM tracks. It HISSES PAST them and they turn to watch it go, dumbfounded. Twenty feet further on it makes a sudden POP AND DISAPPEARS.

TEDDY
What am I doing here anyway?

CHRIS
(face to the sky)
What a pisser! This is gonna be a pisser like you wouldn't believe!

Another lightning bolt crashes down, making them duck. The following CLAP OF THUNDER comes immediately. Our ears are still ringing from it when Vern begins to screech triumphantly.

VERN
THERE! THERE HE IS! RIGHT THERE! I SEE HIM!

Gordie, Chris, and Teddy run up beside him and look. At the bottom of a washout is a marshy, mucky tangle of undergrowth, and sticking out of a wild clockspring of blackberry brambles is a single pale white hand. Lightning flickers and strokes. THUNDER rips in behind each stroke. The breeze becomes a WIND.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Did any of us breathe? I didn't. Somewhere, attached to that hand, was the rest of Ray Brower.

CHRIS
Sheeeee...

It ends with a sigh.

Vern licks his lips in a compulsive sort of way, as if tasting something so weird that it excites and revolts him at the same time.

Teddy just stands and looks. The WIND whips his hair, first away from his ears and then back over them.

There are black ants trundling back and forth across the hand.

A great WHISPERING NOISE begins to rise in the woods. The RAIN STARTS. Dime-sized drops splatter the boys for about five seconds, then stop.

Gordie looks at Chris and Chris blinks back at him. Then the STORM COMES ALL AT ONCE. The rain falls in great sheets as if a shower chain has been pulled in the sky.

Chris jumps over the side of the washout. Gordie follows. Vern and Teddy come close behind. But Chris and Gordie are the first to reach the body of Ray Brower. He is lying face down with his arms over his head like a diver about to execute.

His hair is a dark reddish color. There is blood in it, but not a great deal. Ants are eating the blood. He has on a dark green T-shirt and blue jeans. His feet are bare. But a few feet behind him, caught in tall blackberry brambles, is a pair of filthy low-topped Keds. Gordie looks quizzically at them, then back at the body.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The train had knocked Ray Brower out of his Keds just like it had knocked the life out of his body. The kid wasn't sick, the kid wasn't sleeping. The kid was dead.

Chris and Gordie look at each other. Gordie nods imperceptibly and together they squat down and turn Ray Brower face up into the pouring RAIN, the lightning, the steady CRACK OF THUNDER. There are ants and bugs all over his face and neck. They run briskly in and out of the round collar of his T-shirt. His eyes are open, but terrifyingly out of sync -- one is rolled back so far that we can SEE only a tiny arc of iris; the other stares straight up into the storm.

There is a dried froth of blood above his mouth and on his chin and the right side of his face is lacerated and darkly bruised. Still, he doesn't look bad. Teddy and Vern move in closer behind Chris and Gordie. The boys' eyes widen as a beetle comes out of Ray Brower's mouth, treks across his fuzzless cheek, steps onto a nettle, and is gone.

TEDDY
D'joo see that? I bet he's fuckin' fulla bugs! I bet his brains're...

CHRIS
Shut up, Teddy.

A streak of lightning crackles across the sky, making Ray Brower's single eye light up. Gordie turns and tries to be sick in the bushes, but nothing comes up.

ACE (O.S.)
Well, what the fuck do you know about this?

The boys all jump like they've been goosed and Vern cries out. They look at the body, then realize that the voice came from Ace who's standing with Eyeball on the far side of the boggy patch, where the woods take up again. They're half-obscured by a pouring gray curtain of RAIN. They are both wearing red nylon high school jackets. Their d.a. haircuts have been plastered back against their skulls.

EYEBALL
Sumbitch! That's my little brother.

CHRIS
(trembling voice)
You get away, Rich. We found him. We got dibs.

EYEBALL
Fuck your dibs. We're gonna report him.

GORDIE
No, you're not. We earned him. You guys came in cars. That's not fair. He's ours.

EYEBALL
We're bigger and we're takin' him.

GORDIE
There's four of us, Eyeball. You just try.

ACE
Oh, we'll try, don't worry.

The trees shake behind him and Eyeball, and Charlie, Billy, Jack, Fuzzy, and Vince step out.

ACE
(grinning)
Here we all are. So you just...

BILLY
VERN!! You little sonofawhore! You was under the porch! Cock knocker!

CHARLIE
You little keyhole-peeing bung wipe! I ought to beat the living shit out of you!

TEDDY
Yeah? Well, try it! Come on, fightcha for 'im! Come on! Come on, big men!

Billy and Charlie start forward, but Ace stops them by simply touching them on the shoulder.

ACE
Now listen, you guys. There's more of us than there are of you. We're bigger. We'll give you one chance to just blow away. I don't give a fuck where. Just make like a tree and leave.

Eyeball giggles and Fuzzy claps Ace on the back in appreciation of his great wit.

ACE
'Cause we're takin' him. If you go, we'll take him. If you stay, we'll beat the piss outta you and still take him. Besides, Charlie and Billy found him, so it's their dibs anyway.

TEDDY
They was chicken! Vern told us about it.

Vern looks at Teddy in horror and motions for him to stop.

TEDDY
(snivelling parody of Charlie Hogan)
I wish we never boosted that car! I wish we never went out on no Back Harlow Road to whack off a piece! Oh, Billee, what are we gonna do? Oh Billee, I think I just turned my Fruit of the Looms into a fudge factory! Oh Billee...!

CHARLIE
(starting forward again)
That's it.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Kid, whatever your name is, get ready to reach down your fuckin' throat the next time you need to pick your nose.

ACE
(holding Charlie lightly by the arm)
What do you say, Gordie? You must have at least some of your brother's sense. Tell these guys to back off. I'll let Charlie beat up the foureyes el punko a little bit and then we all go about our business. What do you say?

NARRATOR (V.O.)
He was wrong to mention Denny. I had wanted to reason with him, but what I heard coming out of my mouth instead of sweet reason was my own death warrant.

GORDIE
Suck my fat one, you cheap dimestore hood.

Ace's mouth forms a perfect O of surprise. All of the others on both sides of the bog stare at Gordie dumb-founded.

TEDDY
That's tellin 'im, Gordie! Oh, boy! Too cool!

ACE
(softly)
Okay. Let's take 'em. Don't hurt nobody but the Lachance kid. I'm gonna break both his fuckin' arms.

The big kids advance in a line, their feet splashing through the bog. Jack Mudgett takes out a switchknife and hits the chrome. Six inches of steel flick out. Vern and Teddy drop into fighting crouches on either side of Gordie -- Teddy, eagerly, Vern with a desperate, cornered grimace on his face. The body of Ray Brower lies at their feet like a waterlogged barrel. The big kids are getting closer. Gordie is getting ready to fight when:

KA-BLAM!

Charlie Hogan jumps straight up into the air. Ace, who's been staring at Gordie, jerks around and looks at Chris, who's holding the pistol on them.

EYEBALL
(astounded)
Hey, Chris, that's Daddy's...
You're gonna get the tar whaled
out of you...

CHRIS
That's nothing to what you'll get.
(his eyes blaze out
of his face)
Gordie was right, you're nothing
but a bunch of cheap hoods.
Charlie and Billy didn't want
their fuckin' dibs and you all
know it. We wouldn't have walked
way to fuck out here if they said
they did. They just went
somewhere and puked the story up
and let Ace do their thinkin' for
them.
(screams)
But you ain't gonna get him, do
you hear me?!!

ACE
Now listen. You better put that
down before you take your foot
off with it. You ain't got the
sack to shoot a woodchuck.
(smiling, he starts
forward again)
You're just a sawed-off, pint-
sized, pissy-assed little runt
and I'm going to make you eat
that fuckin' gun.

CHRIS
(steady)
Ace, if you don't stand still I'm
going to shoot you. I swear to
God.

ACE
(not even hesita-
ting, croons)
You'll go to jayy-ail.

His gang watches him with horrified fascination, much the same way Teddy and Vern and Gordie are watching Chris.

CHRIS
(softly, with great regret)
Where do you want it, Ace? Arm or leg? I can't pick. You pick for me.

And Ace stops. His face sags -- sudden terror on it.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
If Chris was bluffing, it's still the best I've ever seen.

ACE
All right. But I know how you're going to come out of this, motherfuck.

CHRIS
No, you don't.

EYEBALL
You little prick! You're gonna wind up in traction for this!

CHRIS
Bite my bag.

With an inarticulate sound of rage, Eyeball rushes forward. Chris puts a BULLET INTO THE WATER in front of him.

EYEBALL
(jumps back)
You son of a bitch, cocksucker, bastard...!

ACE
Okay, now what?

CHRIS
Now you guys get into your cars and bomb on back to Castle Rock. After that I don't care. But you ain't getting him.

Chris touches Ray Brower lightly, almost reverently, with the toe of one sopping sneaker.

CHRIS
You dig me?

ACE
But we'll get you.
(starts to smile again)
Don't you know that?

CHRIS
You might. You might not.

ACE
We'll get you hard. We'll hurt you. I can't believe you don't know that. We'll put you all in the fuckin' hospital with fuckin' ruptures. Sincerely.

CHRIS
Oh, why don't you go home and fuck your mother some more? I hear she loves the way you do it.

ACE
(his smile freezes)
I'll kill you for that. Nobody ranks my mother.

CHRIS
I heard your mother fucks for bucks. In fact, I heard she throws blowjobs for jukebox nickels. I heard...

The STORM COMES BACK, VIOLENTLY, all at once. This time it is HAIL instead of rain. And the SOUND OF BIG HAIL-STONES honking off the tree trunks drowns out everything else. The stinging pebbles hit the boys' shoulders and splatter off Ray Brower's upturned face.

Vern caves in first. With a wailing scream, he flees up the embankment in huge gangling strides. A moment later, Teddy follows. On the big kid's side, Vince Desjardins flounders back under some nearby trees and Fuzzy Bracowicz joins him. But the others stand pat and Ace begins to grin again.

CHRIS
(low, shaky voice)
Stick with me, Gordie. Stick with me, man.

GORDIE
I'm right here.

CHRIS
(to Ace)
Go on now.

ACE
We'll get you. We're not going to forget it, if that's what you're thinking. This is big time, baby.

CHRIS
That's fine. You just go and do your getting another day.

ACE
We'll fuckin' ambush you, Chambers. We'll...

CHRIS
(screams)
Get out!!

He levels the gun at Ace, who takes a step back. Ace looks at Chris a moment longer, nods, then turns around.

ACE
(to the others)
Come on.

He looks over his shoulder at Chris and Gordie once more.

ACE
Be seeing you.

The big kids go back into the screen of trees between the bog and the road. In spite of the hail pelting them, Chris and Gordie stand perfectly still, listening. Finally, they hear TWO CARS START UP.

CHRIS
Stay right here.

He starts across the bog.

GORDIE
(panicky)
Chris!

CHRIS
I got to. Stay here.

He disappears into the trees and Gordie is left alone with Ray Brower. There's a RUSTLE IN THE BRUSH to his right. He jerks around to look but there is nothing there. The HAIL STOPS as suddenly as it began. His eyes anxiously scan the treeline.

The clatter of HAIL FALLING OFF A TREE turns Gordie around. There is no one there but the hail. In the silence that follows, he hears FOOTSTEPS coming toward him across the wet forest floor. He looks at the trees again, straining to see what or who it is. He is poised to run when Chris steps INTO VIEW.

CHRIS
We did it. They're gone.

GORDIE
You sure?

CHRIS
Yeah. Both cars.

He holds his hands over his head, locked together with the gun between them, and shakes the double fist in a wry championship gesture. Then, he drops them and smiles a sad, scared smile at Gordie.

CHRIS
Suck my fat one... whoever told you you had a fat one, Lachance?

GORDIE
Biggest one in four counties.

They look warmly at each other for a second, then embarrassed by their affection, look down at what brought them here. Gordie strangles a scream. Chris' feet splash as he stumbles back from the body. Ray Brower's eyes have gone wide and white, starey and pupilless. They're filled with round white hailstones which are melting and the water is running down his cheeks like tears. His clothes are also white with hail. He seems to be lying in his own shroud.

CHRIS
Oh, Gordie, hey... what a creepshow for him.

GORDIE
I don't think he knows.

CHRIS
Maybe that was his ghost we heard. Maybe he knew this was gonna happen. What a fuckin' creepshow, I'm sincere.

BRANCHES CRACKLE behind them. Gordie whirls, sure to see Ace or Eyeball, but it's Vern and Teddy. After a casual glance at them, Chris goes back to contemplating the body.

CHRIS
(looking at the body)
What are we gonna do, man?

TEDDY
(looking from Chris to Gordie, then back to Chris)
We're gonna take him back, ain't we? We're gonna be heroes. Ain't that right?

Chris looks up as if startled out of a dream. His lip curls. He takes big steps toward Teddy, plants both hands on Teddy's chest, and pushes him roughly backwards. Teddy stumbles, then sits down with a soggy splash. He looks up at Chris in surprise.

CHRIS.
You keep your trap shut. Just like the beach at Normandy, my ass. You lousy rubber chicken.

TEDDY
It was the hail. It wasn't those guys, Chris. I'm ascared of storms.
(he begins to cry)
Shit, I can't help it. I'm ascared of storms.

CHRIS
(to Vern)
What about you? Are you scared of storms, too?

VERN
Hey, man, I thought we was all runnin'.

CHRIS
You must be a mind reader then, because you ran first.

Chris stares at him, his eyes sullen and wild. Vern swallows twice and says nothing.

CHRIS
(turns to Gordie)
Going to build him a litter, Gordie.

GORDIE
If you say so, Chris.

CHRIS
Sure! Like in Scouts. Just like in the fuckin' Scouts. A litter -- poles and shirts. Right, Gordie?

GORDIE
Yeah. If you want. But what if those guys...

CHRIS
(roars)
Fuck those guys!! You're all a bunch of chickens!! Fuck off, creeps!!

GORDIE
Chris, they could call the Constable to...

CHRIS
He's ours and we're gonna take him OUT!

GORDIE
Those guys would say anything to get us in dutch, then lie each other up. Like with the milk mo...

Chris screams and lunges at Gordie with his fists up.

CHRIS
I DON'T CARE!!!

One of his feet hits Ray Brower's ribcage and he trips and falls full length in the muddy waters. Gordie looks at him waiting for him to get up. But he begins to cry and scream, his body bucking up and down, splashing the water around, his fists drumming, his head twisting from side to side.

Vern and Teddy stare at him. After a moment or two, Gordie walks back to the embankment, climbs it, and sits down on one of the rails. Teddy and Vern follow. And they sit there, not talking, looking like the three monkeys of virtue.

Chris' crying fades. The clouds break. Spears of sun come down through the rips. Somewhere a BIRD BEGINS TO SING. Finally, in a LONG SHOT FROM BEHIND THE BOYS, we SEE Chris' head appear above the embankment. He climbs up to stand beside them. They all look at the body for a moment.

CHRIS
You're right, Gordie. Nobody gets last dibs. Goocher all around, huh?...

Gordie nods.

CHRIS
Let's go.

Gordie stands up.

TEDDY
(getting up)
Hey, come on! Aren't we gonna take him?

GORDIE
We already got what we came for.

TEDDY
What the fuck are you talking about? We're gonna take him out. We're gonna be on TV. We're gonna be famous!

VERN
(standing up)
It wouldn't be right, Teddy.

TEDDY
But Ace and those guys were gonna take him.

CHRIS
Yeah, they were.

The boys watch as it begins to sink in for Teddy.

VERN
Come on. Let's go.

As if on strings, the boys turn and look back at Ray Brower. He's lying there, alone again, his arms spread-eagle as if to welcome the sunshine.

CHRIS
Okay. Double time.

They start to almost trot back the way they came.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
(as they move AWAY FROM US)
Ray Brower's body was found. But neither our gang nor their gang got the credit. In the end, Ace must have decided that an anonymous phone call was the safest course, because that's how the location of the corpse was reported.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRAIN TRESTLE - NIGHT

Silhouetted against the sliver of moon, the four boys trot across it.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CASTLE ROCK - DAWN

The sun is seeping over the horizon.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
We got back to Castle Rock a little past five o'clock on Sunday morning, the day before Labor Day. We had walked all night.

EXT. BEEMAN'S FIELD - DAWN

The boys are plodding across it into town.

EXT. CARBINE STREET - DAWN

The boys pass the Blue Point Diner and the Castle Rock Drugstore. The street is empty and awesomely quiet. At the first intersection, Vern splits off.

VERN
Well, guys, see ya in school on Wednesday. I think I'm gonna sleep till then.

GORDIE/CHRIS/TEDDY
See ya... Yeah... Me, too... Bye...

They continue on, but Vern remains IN THE FRAME even as he angles away from them down the side street.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Six years later Vern Tessio died in a fire that swept a Lewiston tenement after a drunken party. Someone fell asleep with a live cigarette. Vern himself, maybe, drifting off, dreaming of his pennies.

Vern's figure fades, then disappears right before our eyes.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAWN

Gordie, Chris, and Teddy stop in front of the vacant lot and look up at their treehouse.

CHRIS
We did it. We did the bastard, didn't we?

GORDIE
Yeah.

CHRIS
You think it was worth it?

GORDIE
Sure it was.

TEDDY
Fuck this. You guys sound like fuckin' Meet The Press. Gimme some skin, man. I'm gonna toot home and see if Mom's got me on the Ten Most Wanted List.

Laughing, they give him some skin. But in turning to go, Teddy hesitates.

TEDDY
(to Chris)
Hey, man. No hard feelings, okay?

CHRIS
No way.

TEDDY
See ya in school.

They watch him go, then:

CHRIS
Walk with you?

GORDIE
Sure, okay.

They start to walk while behind them we can SEE Teddy heading for his house.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
We had a saying. 'If you go out alone you're a hero. Take somebody else with you and you're dogpiss.'

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
In 1971 Teddy took five people with him in a squalid car crash. He was posthumously given the Dogpiss of the Year Award.

Teddy's figure fades and disappears.

EXT. STREET - DAWN

Chris and Gordie walk past the Red & White and The Stationery Shoppe in silence.

CHRIS
(finally)
They'll tell.

GORDIE
Maybe. But not today or tomorrow, if that's what you're worried about. They're scared, Chris. It'll be a long time before they tell, I think. Years maybe... I know this sounds fucking crazy, but... I think they'll almost forget it ever happened.

CHRIS
I didn't think of it just like that.

Another silence settles over them. Chris is the one who breaks it.

CHRIS
I'm never gonna get out of this town... When you come back from college on summer vacation, you'll be able to look me up at Sukey's after the seven-to-three shift's over. If you want to. Except you'll probably never want to.

GORDIE
Quit jerking yourself off.

CHRIS
No jerkoff, daddy-o.

Gordie rubs his first finger over his thumbnail.

GORDIE
This is the world's smallest violin playing 'My Heart Pumps Purple Piss for You'.

Chris smiles. There's a pause.

CHRIS
(softly)
He was ours.

There's another pause.

GORDIE
You can do anything you want, Chris.

THUMP!!! Chris and Gordie turn in the direction of the SOUND and see the Sunday Telegram truck pull away from the Blue Point Diner and stop in front of The Stationery Shoppe. A MAN in blue jeans and a T-shirt throws off a bundle of papers, showing the color funnies. There's another THUMP!!! and the truck drives off.

CHRIS
Gimme some skin, man.

GORDIE
Chris...

CHRIS
Skin.

Gordie slaps his palm.

GORDIE
I'll see you.

CHRIS
Not if I see you first, fuck face.

He walks off, laughing, and Gordie watches him go.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Chris enrolled in the college courses with me and although it was difficult for him, he stuck with it and graduated 19th in our high school class. He went on to college. In his second year of law school he entered a Chicken Delight to get a three-piece snack bucket.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Just ahead of him two men started arguing about who was first in line. One of them pulled a knife. Chris, who had always made the best peace, stepped between them and was stabbed in the throat. He died almost instantly.

Chris turns to Gordie. With a smile, Gordie waves. Chris waves back. In the middle of it, he fades and disappears. Gordie lowers his arm and heads for home. Over A CLOSEUP of his face as he walks TOWARD US, the Narrator's WORDS APPEAR IN the GREEN PRINT OF A WORD PROCESSOR.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
That was ten years ago and I still miss him a lot.

The B.G. for the words DISSOLVES into the darkness of a display terminal while Gordie's FACE DISSOLVES INTO a reflection of a 32-year-old version of himself in the terminal.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Of the four of us who flipped coins to see who would go down to the Florida Market to get supplies, only the one who actually went is still alive.

BOY (O.S.)
Come on, Dad, practice starts at four.

INT. HOUSE - GORDON LACHANCE'S OFFICE - DAY

GORDON (32) looks up from the word processor at his twelve-year-old SON and his twelve-year-old FRIEND standing in the doorway. Both boys have towels over their shoulders and swimming goggles hanging around their necks.

GORDON
You ready?

SON
Yeah! We've been ready for half an hour!

GORDON
I'll be right there.

The boys leave.

FRIEND (O.S.)
Is he always like this?

SON (O.S.)
Only when he's writing.

Gordon returns to work.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
(as Gordon types the words)
And if small events do echo larger and larger through time, yes, maybe if we had done the simple thing and simply hitched into Harlow, Chris, Teddy, and Vern would still be alive today.

He stares at the screen for a moment, then gets up and goes to the coat rack next to the closet. He plucks off a jacket and, wandering over to the window, puts it on.

Outside, his Son, his Friend, and two other twelve-year-old BOYS are having a towel fight on the lawn next to the station wagon.

Watching them, he runs his fingers through his hair, smiles, then goes back to the word processor and, still standing, types:

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I never had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve. Jesus, does anyone?

He looks at what he's written for a second. He's satisfied. He takes out the disc and turns off the machine. As he leaves the room, the SCREEN GOES BLACK.

FADE OUT.

THE END